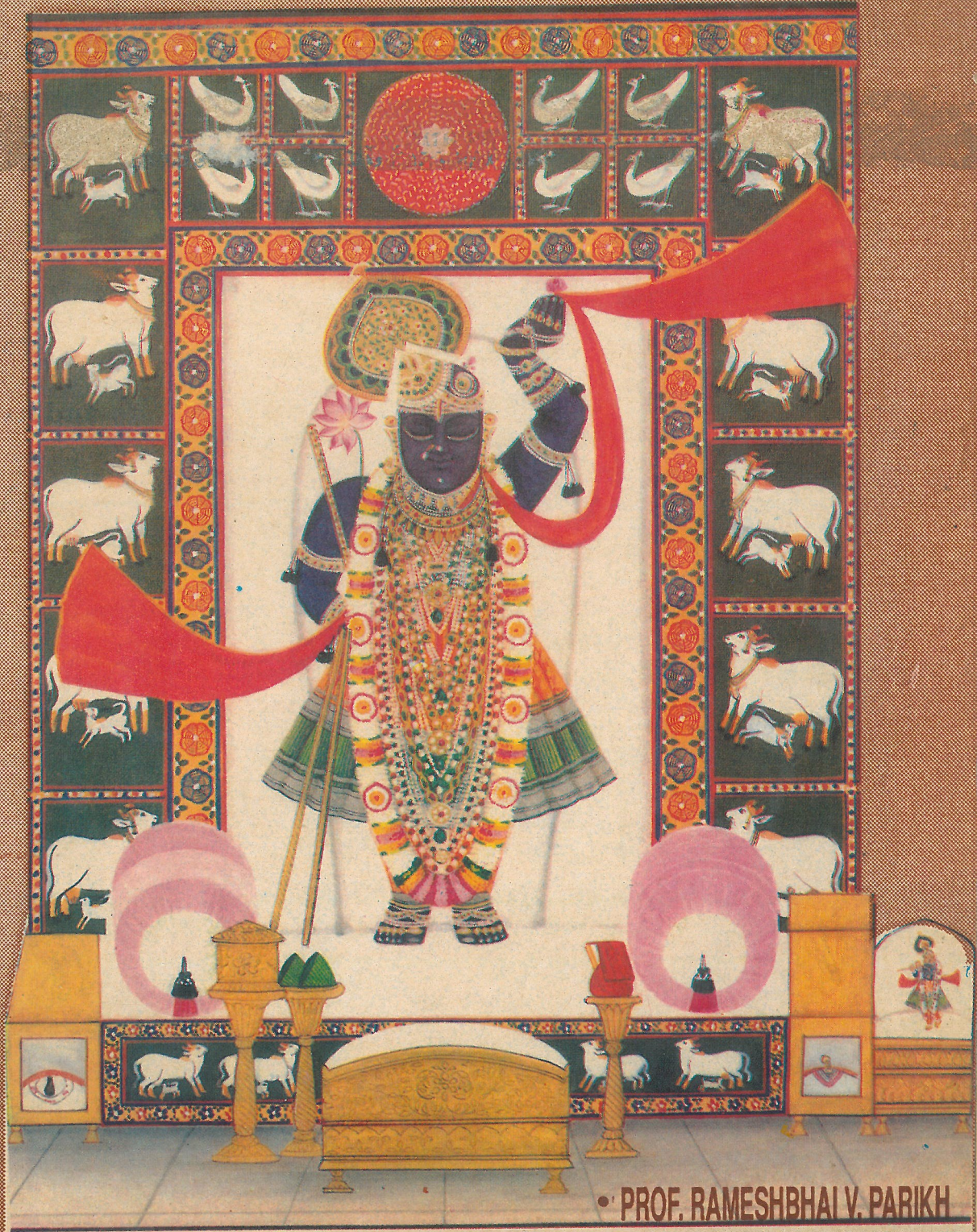


RANGEELA SHRINATHJI



• PROF. RAMESHBHAI V. PARIKH

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A WORD FROM GRANDFATHER

Dear Children,

Grandfather's blessings and Jai Shri Krishna.

Do you like to listen stories, isn't it ? You may have listened stories of king and queen, fairies, tigers and lions, parrot and cat. Today I will tell you a story allready different from such stories. It is the story of our dear Shrijibāvā. You must have the 'Darshan' of Shrijibāvā. 'Isn't He lovable ? His story is also very interesting. I hope you will love it. Do read it, because it is specially written for you. There are fine pictures along with the story. You will enjoy the story and its pictures too.

For this book we should be grateful to many. The joint editor of Balpushti *Miss Shefaliben Shah* deserves warm congratulations for its English translation. You must thank her. *Mr. Baldevbhai Mistry* has prepared all the inner pictures for the book. We also thank him. My friend *Prof. Rajanbhai Kadia* has taken pains for the quality printing of this book. Let us thank him too.

Mrs. Kumudben Thakarar (U.K.) and Mr. Kiritbhai Desai (U.S.A.) are generous enough to present you this book. We are very much thankful to their two families. Please convey your Jai Shri Krishna to them.

You also have the 'Darshan' of revered 'Jiji'- *Goswami Shri Indira Betiji*. It is because of Her that this book has been published and presented to you. Let us bow Her with reverence.

Do write how you live this book .

Blessings to you all and thanks to all, whose help I got in this publication.

॥ Shrināth: vijayté ॥

RANGEELĀ SHRINĀTHJI



by

Prof. Rameshbhai V. Parikh

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1. GOD HAS APPEARED

A few miles from Mathura, there is a small beautiful village called Anyor. It is at the base of Shri Govardhan Mountain. The lush greenery of the Kadamb, Tamal, Banyan and Peepal trees all around, is reflected in the kunds brimming with water. In its soft white sands are small houses, white washed with lime. While the cows graze in the pastures on the outskirts of the village, the peacock, parrot and koel fill the air with their sonorous sounds. The monkeys are at play, in the trees. The simple and humble Vrajasis who live here, love Krishna Kanhaiya. This is the Vikram Samvat 2049 year. To date 584 years ago, a miraculous and divine incident occurred.

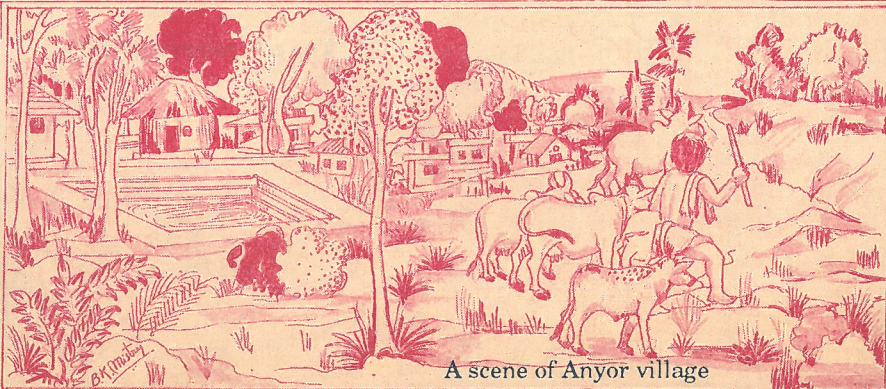
A Brahmin named Govardhandas lived here. He was the village chief and was reasonably happy. A cowherd named Mansukha also lived here. He was responsible for taking all the cows of the village for grazing. These included all Govardhandas' cows. Among his many cows was a milkwhite, well-formed cow. She had striking jetblack horns and was

called Dhumar. She was dear to all. Very suddenly, her milk stopped flowing, both-in the morning and evening. After the same situation persisted for four days, Govardhan Das was a little perturbed. He doubted Mansukhā and suspected him of drinking the milk !

He sent for Mansukha and scolded him. But Mansukha protested that he would prefer to ask than to steal. He vowed to observe Dhumar closely and report within two days.

He started the very next day. He noticed that while the other cows were grazing, Dhumar would quietly slip away and as quietly she would climb the Govardhan Mountain. On reaching a particular spot, she released the milk from her udders and the flow went straight through a crack inside the mountain. After having finished, she came down again. This was repeated in the morning and evening, which surprised Mansukha immensely. That a cow can release her milk, without being milked, was hard to believe !

On hearing this, Govardhandas wanted to witness it all, personally.



A scene of Anyor village

He took a few other Vrajvasis and went with Mansukha. When they all saw the entire scene with their own eyes, they were completely stunned with disbelief and then of course the news spread like wild fire all around the village.

A village elder, Mohanji, was very experienced and wise. He advised the chief, 'I have heard from other elders that only if there is a deity or some treasure, will a cow give milk in this manner' - So they decided to investigate.

Mohanji, and the other villagers, reached the mountain top. On seeing a slab of stone they all lifted it and peered inside the crack. They saw complete darkness.

A youngster noticed it first and spoke aloud to the others, 'Look, the deity's left hand is held up, as if it is calling us.'

Suddenly people started talking : 'The hand is black in colour.'

'But why can't the deity be seen ? Let us move this other slab of stone.'

Then a thunderous sound was heard from the sky- and it was fol-

lowed by a sweet voice : 'Oh, my dear Vrajvasis, do not remove this stone. I am the deity of pure devotees, and my name is Devdaman. I reside here. I will come out from here when it is my will.'

When the villagers heard this sweet voice of a seven year old child, Mohanji at once said, 'The deity has manifested Himself, so now we cannot leave Him, without worshipping, in some way.' The rest of them asked him how to do so. He replied, 'Let us do puja of the left hand which is visible.'

Now they all ran down the mountain to the village ! Lo, behold ! The mountain top was crowded with Vrajvasis. They all had brought back milk, curd, butter, water, flowers, tulsi, kumkum, rice, sandalwood, white and pink powder (abeel and gual). They also carried various musical instruments like cymbals and drums. Then they bathed the hand with milk, after which the puja was done and all the items of food, that they had brought were offered.

Devdaman was hailed in all His glory. In the evening the place was



overcrowded with curious people, wanting to catch a glimpse.

That auspicious day was V. S. 1466 on Shravan Sud Pancham or Nag Panchmi.

2. GOD EMERGES FROM GIRIKANDRA

This miracle had occurred exactly seven decades ago. Now the village chief was Sadu Pande. His family consisted of a brother, whose name was Manek Chand Pande, his wife Bhavani and daughter Naro.

One day, a similar experience happened with Sadu Pande. He set out to find the reason for one of his cow's sudden dryness. This cow used to break away from the herd, and climb the mountain top. After emptying her udders, she would rejoin the herd.

He immediately spoke to the village elders. One of them, Makhanlal slowly made himself heard. 'Bhai Sadu, I remember, when I was ten yrs. old, exactly the same thing had happened. All we saw was the left hand of that deity raised up. After a divine voice was heard from the sky,

the villagers started worshipping the visible hand. Now after seventy years, your cow has started giving milk in same spot. We can be sure to get darshan of the deity. Tomorrow it is Ekadashi, so you all must go together, ready to do puja.'

The following day Sadu Pande, his brother and some other village folk set out for the mountain top; fully equipped for a puja, with milk, curds and other items. On reaching the spot, they all first performed the puja of the 'Hand' - with intense devotion.

It was a bright sunny morning with a clear sky, when they left the village. By the time, they had finished with the puja, it was afternoon. Unexpectedly, dark clouds gathered, lightning flashed in the sky with a rip-roaring sound, which made the stone slabs tremble and fall. There was a light as brilliant as the sun. Its blinding brightness revealed God to all present!

How did He appear at sight? Well He was a seven year old, 4 feet tall, dark coloured, beautiful well built child with the right hand on his waist and the left hand raised upward, with



His jet black hair tied in a topknot. He had collyrium (mesh) in His eyes. On His forehead He wore a saffron tilak and white cloth around the lower torso !

The instant this darshan was seen, there was a spontaneous outburst—

*'Joy has come to Nandbāvā's house,
hail to Kanhaiyalal !
He donates elephants,
horses and palanquins (palki).'*

The Gods from their abodes, came flying in their vehicles and made a celestial picture in the sky. After doing darshan, they played the drums, while the clouds thundered. Then the Gods showered flowers as rain drops started falling slowly. The apsaras were like lightning as they danced with joy. All this was done in honour to welcome the appearance of God.

The simple devotional Vrajvasis poured milk as an oblation to Nagdaman, and then with pure hearts and minds they offered milk and curd as food. Even as they were finishing, they all heard a loud voice from the sky, 'I am going to remain here until such time when I decide to come out

from this cave.' That Ekadashi day was in V. S. 1535 in the month of Chaitra vad. At that same time, Shri Mahāprabhuji was born in Champaran. God and Mahāprabhuji both appeared at the sama time.

3. THE DARLING OF VRAJVASIS

Naro was a fair, pretty little girl. She was only 8 years old, but her voice was sweeter than honey, and by nature friendly and affectionate. Her favourite game was hide and seek, for which she would wear a ghaghra (long skirt) and choli, and join her friends every evening. Her hiding place was the mountain-top where she met Devdaman one day.

He told her that He was hungry. Naro at once asked him, 'My dear Lala, what can I bring for you ?'

'Morning and evening, I only want your Dhumar cow's milk.' He replied. Naro accepted the reply. As soon as she reached home she told her mother about Devdaman's request. Bhavani immediately milked Dhumar, and after sweetening the pot of milk with sugar, she gave it to Naro.



When Naro gave it to God, He gulped it quickly. Having finished all the milk He was ready to play hide and seek with 8 yr old Naro !

This became a routine with both of them. 'Devdaman, who is your father? Lala, where is your village ? Who is your mother ? Do you have any brother or sister ?' Naro used to ask Devdaman.

'Naro, my village is *Gokul*. My name is *Kanhaiya*. My father is *Nandbāvā*, my mother is *Yashodā*. and Brother is *Daöbhaiyā*.' was God's reply.

'Lala, why did you leave *Gokul* and come here ?'

'To play with you and drink your *Dhumar's* milk.'

Years just passed by like this.

Charming little Naro had a grandmother, who was 80 yrs old. Although she was nearly blind, she was extremely fond of children. To show her affection for them, she used to fill a basket with rotis and a big vessel with butter. Then she would sit in the corner and wait for

the children to queue up, and sure enough the village children came and stood in a line. She had her own special way of greeting each child. While holding the right hand, she would stroke the child's left cheek, and after that child had spoken his name, she would give him a roti with some butter.

This old lady was in for a beautiful surprise one day, because *Devdaman* crept in slowly and stood at the end. When it was His turn, Grandmother greeted Him in the same way, like the rest. She realized that this was a new child and asked His name.

'I am *Devdaman*' was the reply.

Absoloutely delighted, she asked, whether He liked her roti and butter ! 'Oh yes.' He answered.

'Lala, take this, Please come everyday !' said the Grandmother and sure enough, *Devdaman* was there every single day for roti and butter !

Our dear *Devdaman* has made another friend. Let us find out more.

There is a village called *Ading* in *Vraj*. A *Vrajvasi* named *Dharamdas*



lived here with his nephew, Kumbhandas. This boy was only twelve years old, but gifted with a melodious voice and sang *bhajans* (devotional songs).

One day who should appear in their house ? Yes, dear little Devdaman. With a red stick in His hand He spoke to Dharamdas, 'Bhaiya, do you have any inkling as to who I am ?'

'Oh, Lala, the whole of Vraj knows you. You are our Devdaman. Now please tell me, how can I serve you ?' asked Dharamdas.

'Sadu Pande has a cow named Dhumar, who comes from the lineage of one of Nanabāvā's cows. This cow used to give the sweetest milk, which I used to drink. But for some unknown reason she has stopped giving any milk.'

'Lala, what is your wish ? Your wish is my command.' said Dharamdas.

'Do you know that even you have a cow, from the same pedigree as another of Nandbāvā's cows. I will show her if you come with me.' said Devdaman.

So the two, went to the cow-shed and, He pointed out the cow, whom He patted lovingly.

'Lala, from now you can be sure that Kumbhan will bring you this cow's milk. Happy ?' asked Dharamdas.

'Oh no, you will take this cow to Sadu Pande's cow-shed and tie her there.' said Devdaman.

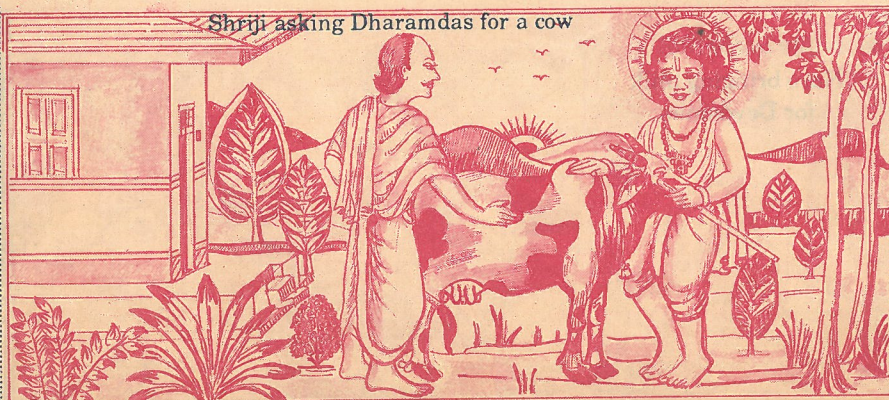
Dharamdas said, 'It will be just as you desire. I am leaving this very minute with the cow.'

'There is one more desire to be fulfilled. You must send Kumbhan to me every single day. How I will enjoy playing with him !' said Devdaman.

But unable to wait for even one more day, He insisted on taking Kumbhan with Him at that moment.

Devdaman, proud of His new friend, walked out with a dance like posture and movements. He had put his right hand on his friend's left shoulder while His walk was rhythmic.

Together, they spent fourteen years. During these years Vrajvasis fed Him with His favourite foods. He used to enjoy going inside their



homes and playing around. Altogether they were happy times.

The outskirts of Anyor village were filled with the joyous sounds of Devdaman playing with children.

There was a very great saint called *Mādhvéndra Yati*. He was a disciple of *Shri Krishna Chaitanya*. Being a devout follower of Shri Krishna, he came to Vraj to undertake a pilgrimage. On hearing about our Devdaman in *Vrindāvan*, he rushed to Anyor for darshan. He was very satisfied after doing darshan.

Kind as they are, the Vrajvasis gave him plenty by way of alms. *Mādhavéndra Yati* prepared a meal from the provisions and went to offer it to Devdaman, with great hope that He would eat it.

But Devdaman said, '*Sanyāsi bāvē*, I am not going to accept or eat any meal at present. My dear Vrajvasis feed me with milk and curd, which I accept whole heartedly. Please return after a few years and I will definitely grace you with my *sévā* !'

4. THE FIRST MEETING

After having completed ten years of his childhood in Kashi, Mahāprabhu Shri Vallabh decided to go on a pilgrimage to the four religious places – '*tirths*.' But when he sought permission from his mother, it was refused. After a little persuasion she agreed.

He set out with four of his father's followers. He chose to dress simply, in a white dhoti and an uprena on top, not a single stitched outfit did he wear ! He always walked barefooted, and abstained from the use of any vehicle. He never camped in the village proper, but always on the outskirts. His roof was a tree and his bed was the earth. He believed in cooking by himself, serving God and then eating : Such was the austere life of Shri Mahāprabhuji.

One of the holy places he had to visit was Jagannath Puri, but he had to stop for a night in a dense forest near Jharkhand in Bihar. That night he had a dream in which Devdaman spoke to him, '*Vallabh, it is now fourteen years since we both appeared together on this earth. I am now only*

Shri Mahāprabhuji
near Sedu Pandé's
house with Vrajvasis



waiting for you to come quickly to Anyor and take me out from this mountain. Come and do my sévā.' Shri Vallabh was so happy and overjoyed, that he cancelled his journey to Jagannathpuri and proceeded instead to Vraj. It was Ekadashi day in V. S. 1549.

After travelling for 47 days Shri Vallabh reached Anyor, where he rested for a while on the porch of Sadu Pande house. Sadu Pande went to meet him and requested his permission to prepare food for him. But one of His followers, Krishnadas Meghan said that he only ate what He cooked. Shri Vallabh remained quiet.

Just then that very honey like sweet voice was heard, 'Naro, I am very hungry. Bring the milk quickly.'

Naro came running out to the porch and looking up at the mountain top said, 'Dearest Lala, I am late today because we have a guest here. I am on my way.' Again the same voice, 'Your guest is my guest. First bring my milk.'

Shri Vallabh observed all this and waited for Naro to return. When she

did, he asked her, 'Is there any milk left in the pot?' Naro's reply was, 'There is only a few drops left, but by your grace there is plenty in the house.'

'No, but I want what has remained.' So Naro gave the pot to Shri Vallabh, who drank those few drops and was very happy.

That night, Shri Vallabh made Sadu Pande and Manek Chand Pande narrate the entire episode in detail. After having heard it all he said, Tomorrow it is *akshay-tritiyā*, an auspicious day, so we will all go to the mountain in the morning.'

Early next morning, the villagers arrived, with full fanfare. They were colourfully dressed and carried drums and cymbals to play along on the way. To start with they sang, 'Our God is Shri Govardhanrai.'

Shri Mahāprabhuji was also ready, having bathed and done his sévā. He was dressed in a white *dhoti* with an orange border and a matching *uprēnā*. His followers had carried so many items to offer Shri Govardhan. When they reached Shri Giriraj, they



thought, "Shri Giriraj is not an ordinary mountain, but an incarnation of God Himself. That is why even Lord Krishna worshipped it by offering the feast of Annakut".

After Shri Vallabh had prostrated in front of Shri Giriraj he offered a prayer :

*'Bhaktābhilāshā-charitānusāri,
Dugdhādichauryéñ Yashovihāri,
Kumāritānandit ghosh-nāri,
Mam prabhu: Shri Girirājdhāri.'*

When he finished, all the people present hailed the glory of Shri Giriraj. Then Shri Vallabh asked Shri Giriraj whether he could see Devdaman. The ones to lead were Sadu Pande and Manek Chand Pande, then Shri Vallabh and behind him were his followers.

Shri Vallabh had barely taken four steps upward when the strains of flute were heard. Shri Vallabh turned towards the direction of the sound and there he saw Devdaman standing, with a yellow dhoti and red uprena. On his head He wore a titled yellow pāgh with three peacock feathers tucked in (Kulgi). He wore

such pretty pearl necklaces and garland of flowers that Shri Vallabh was spell bound. Devdaman continued to look at him, without batting an eyelid. Now they both were anxious to meet!

What a sight to watch ! As Shri Mahāprabhuji jumped one step forward, Devdaman took one big leap downwards. How their lips curled up in a smile! and Shri Vallabh said, 'Your lips are sweet' –

'Adharam madhuram.'

Now, Shri Vallabh, took another big step forward and Devdaman another step down, towards him. They were both admiring each other's face and glow and Shri Vallabh spontaneously said, 'Your face is sweet' – *'Vadanam madhuram.'*

The third step upward was Shri Vallabh's and the one downward was Devdaman's, the two pairs of eyes met and were locked as if in a trance, which produced an upsurge of emotions and love. This made Shri Vallabh sing, 'Your eyes are sweet' –

'Nayanam madhuram.'

With the fourth step they burst into loud laughter and Shri Vallabh said,



'Your laughter is sweet' –
'*Hasitam madhuram.*'

The fifth step brought them very close. Shri Vallabh said, 'Your heart is sweet' –

'*Hridayam madhuram.*'

Now the sixth step was also a big leap. which our Devdaman took. This brought them both to touching distance and so Shri Vallabh said, 'Your walking is sweet' –

'*gaman madhuram.*'

It was the seventh and final move which made them outstretch their arms and embrace with warmth and love. Now Shri Vallabh broke into a melodious *shlok* : (Verse)

*Adharam madhuram,
vadanam madhuram,
Nayanam madhuram,
hasitam madhuram.*

*Hridayam madhuram,
gamanam madhuram,
Madhuradhipate-
rakhilam madhuram.*

Devdaman repeated the same *shlok*.

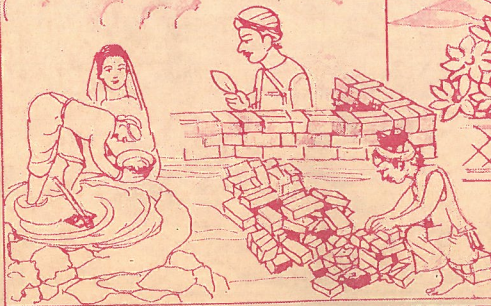
5. FORMAL INSTALLATION OF THE DEITY

Devdaman instructed Shri Vallabh in front of all the Vrajvasis, who were present, 'Build a small temple for me. Start doing my sévā in the correct method.'

The villagers had been waiting patiently all these years, just to hear this. Immediately, one and all set to work, and a small temple, of bricks and mud was completed, They brought Dev-daman out from the cave in the Giriraj mountain known as '*Girikandra*' and placed Him inside the temple, which they had built so devotionally. Amidst the chanting of mantras from the Vedas and performing the necessary rituals, Shri Vallabh bathed Him with '*panch-amrit*' (consisting of 5 items, uncooked milk, ghee, honey, curd and castor sugar). Then he dressed Him with an orange bordered *dhoti* and uprena, and placed a *pag* of the same material on His head. A fragrant mogra necklace adorned His neck.

Once He was completely ready, Shri Vallabh enthusiastically served

Constructing a mud
temple for Shriji



Shri Vallabh
in Shriji's Sévā



Him 'samagri' (specially prepared eats). Then after doing the arti, everyone present hailed the glory of their beloved Devdaman.

On that eventful day, Vaishakh sud Trij in V. S.1549, Shri Vallabh, called all the Vrajvasis, and addressed the gathering, 'Pandeji, I have placed Devdaman properly in the temple. But I am not going to remain here forever, so you will be trained by me for the correct method of doing sévā, and take charge.'

'But Maharaj, we are simple ordinary villagers, who are ignorant about many aspects, like speech and manner, touchable and untouchable. Besides we are busy in the fields all day. So when will we get the time to serve Devdaman ?'

'In that case, who should I assign for this job ?'

'There is someone, whom I can call. He is the Sage Ramdas, who lives in a cave of this mountain which is near Apsara kund. He will be a good choice.'

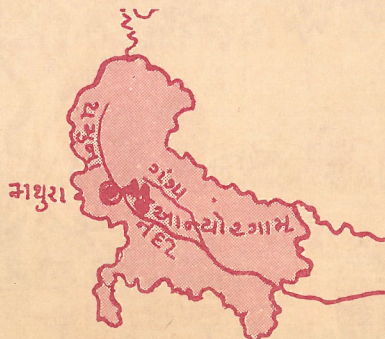
Shri Vallabh agreed to this suggestion, and Ramdas came to meet

him. He accepted the responsibility and was made Mahāprabhuji's follower. Along with him Sadu Pande and the other Vrajvasis also became Vaishnavs. Then Shri Mahāprabhuji taught Rāmdās the entire procedure of sévā. He delegated Sadu Pande and his brother with the supervisory task of the sévā. Dev-daman's dear friend Kumbhandas was given the sévā of singing kirtan.

At the end of it all Shri Vallabh told them, 'From now, Devdaman is entirely yours to take care of. You must make sure that He is never in want, or made to suffer. He must be kept happy at all times.' They all accepted his command.

6. SHRINĀTHJI'S KATHA

Little Naro was very eager to learn more about Devdaman; so she sat crosslegged, facing Shri Vallabh, one day and asked him, 'Devdaman is so dear to me, but who is He ?' Shri Vallabh said, 'Why don't you ask him yourself ?' Naro said that despite repeated attempts, to do so, He had never evinced any reply. Then Kumbhandas also expressed a de-



Map showing Anyor



Rāmdāsji and Shri Vallabh

sire to know more about their beloved Devdaman. Together they urged Shri Mahāprabhuji to reveal more.'

Shri Vallabh relented and started, 'Do you all remember Nandbāvā's Krishna-Kanhaiya and how He discontinued the performance of the Indrayagna ?'

'Yes, He made the Vrajvasis perform the Shri *Govardhan-puja*. Till, todate, we religiously perform this puja on Kartik sud ékam day.' replied Manek Chand Pande.

'Do you remember that the Vrajvasis had offered the big feast of Annakut ?'

'Yes, it was at that time, that God had manifested Himself from the Giriraj mountain and feasted with His thousand hands.'

'While He feasted, He kept asking the Vrajvasis for more and more 'aan aur aan aur' (bring more, bring more), which is where your village had got its name Anyor.

All the villagers, present, were excited, on hearing this.

'That God was none other than our beloved Shri Krishna. And now this same Shri Krishna has taken the form of Devdaman who will also keep asking you for more and more.'

In disbelief they said, 'Shri Krishna is Devdaman ?'

'Yes, now listen in more detail, 'Shri Krishna had humbled three Gods. First, by lifting the Giriraj Mountain, He had belittled king Indra's puffed up arrogance. He had also made Brahma and Mahadev swallow their pride and bow in humility to Him. Thus He is called *Devdaman*. His second name is *Nagdaman*. Nag meaning, serpent and elephant. Shri Krishna had succeeded in vanquishing *Kaliya Nāg* and *Kuvalayāpeed* and *Airāvat* elephants. Since He had forgiven Indra and stopped the *Indra-yagna*, He is called *Indradaman*.'

With rapt attention they all nodded in awe. Shri Vallabh said, 'This same Shri Krishna Devdaman has reappeared from the Govardhan mountain. That is why He is known as Shri Govardhannathji.'



Shriji playing with Kumbhandas

'But, we cannot say this name fluently, So we prefer to call Him Shrināthji.'

'It is still a long name, so I say Shriji or Shrijibāvā.'

Each one was busy deciding on a name by which he could address Dev-daman and seeing this Shri Vallabh was extremely pleased. Their innocence and warmth touched him.

But curiosity still drove them to ask more about Shrijibāvā, 'Why does Shrināthji keep one hand on His waist and the other raised up?'

'As Shrināthjibāvā is standing, He is calling His devotees to Him, by raising His left hand. Those who surrender to Shriji, He protects them Himself, that is the reason for His right Hand folded in a fist.'

Naro was so excited and delighted, she sang "Giriraj dharan, Shriji tihare saran."

7. SHRIJI BECOMES A 'GOPAL'

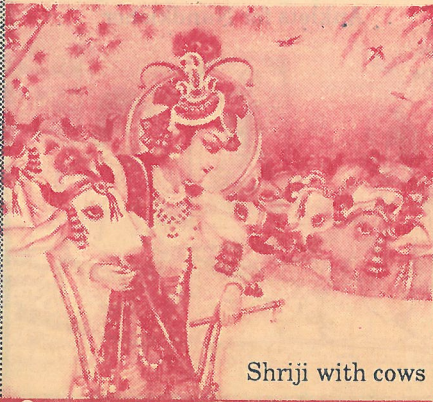
One day Shrijibāvā told, 'Vallabh, I love cows very dearly. So much so that one day Yashodāmā had told me

to wear sandals on my feet and I had refused. My answer was 'Maiya, first you make them for all my nine lakh cows. Only after they have worn them will I wear. I am lonely without cows. Please buy me one cow.'

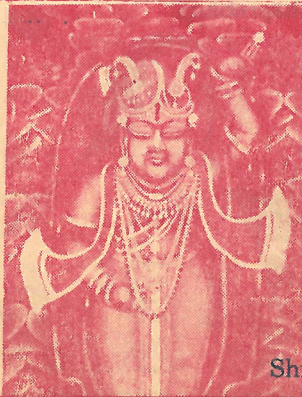
So Shri Vallabh called Sadu Pāndé and said, 'Pandeji, from this money, you will buy a cow for Shrināthji.' He said, 'Mahārāj, I will go right now and bring all my cows. They all belong to Shrijibāvā. Why buy a new one?'

'Pāndéji, your feelings are pure. But what Shriji has asked for, I cannot refuse. Buy one cow for me.' Sadu Pāndé chose a wonderful cow for Shriji, which Shri Mahāprabhuji offered Him. Along with which, Sadu Pande also offered his choicest cows. As soon as, the Vrajvāsī heard about this. they all brought their cows to offer Shrināthji.

With so many cows being presented to Shriji, a cow-shed was built, and a village called Gopālpur was formed at the foothills of the mountain. Now Shriji had become a (cow-herd) 'Gopāl.'



Shriji with cows



Shrināthji

8. ANKLETS FOR NANDKISHOR

It happened one day when Shriji was playing and He came and sat in Shri Mahāprabhuji's lap. He looked playfully at him and said, 'Vallabh, without the tinkling of anklets on my feet, I don't enjoy 'ras.' So, I want a pair of anklets.'

This made Shri Mahāprabhuji very happy. Once again he called Sadu Pande and gave him four gold coins. He instructed him to have a beautiful pair of gold anklets made for Shriji.

When they were ready, Shri Mahāprabhuji fondly took them to present them to Shriji. Oh! how enthralled He become, as He danced around and let the anklets tinkle.

Shri Mahāprabhuji then explained to Sadu Pande, 'Pandeji, always remember that we are here to do sévā. The real sévā of Shriji is keeping His happiness and joy in mind. Whenever He asks for something make sure that it is fulfilled at once. See how delighted He is with these anklets.'

'Yes, this is worth remembering for ever, and from now on, we will

always strive to keep Him happy.' Pandeji said.

9. IS JACKAL AFFRAID OF A LION ?

Very close to Shri Govardhan mountain there was a very dense forest. It was called 'Todkā Ghanā' by everyone. Amidst this jungle lived a sanyāsi – mendicant whose name was Chaturā Nāgā. He was always in deep meditation and had one sole desire to see God.

He heard about the incredible appearance of God from the Giriraj mountain, and His feast with a thousand hands, asking for more. This news created a deep stirring within and he became restless.

Being a learned and wise devotee, he decided against going to the mountain top. He knew that you cannot touch your foot to God, so how could he climb the Giriraj mountain which was God personified ? Now Chaturā Nāgā's inner sentiment for darshan grew stronger.

At around the same time, something happened. Sadu Pande, his brother, Ramdasji and Kumbhandas

Shri Mahāprabhuji



Anklets for Nandkishor



were seated together near Shrijibāvā in His temple. Suddenly their peace was disturbed by a youth who barely managed to speak; having run a long way, he was huffing and panting, 'Pandeji, the king from Delhi has reached Mathura with his armed forces. They are destroying our temples and deities. I am sure he will reach here, in Vraj also.'

They all became gloomy. They felt Shri Mahāprabhuji's absence and were worried as to how to safeguard Shriji-bāvā. To dispel their worry, Shrijibāvā laughed and said, 'There is a way out. Take me to that forest *Todkā Ghanā*. This is the month of Shravan. I will enjoy myself there !'

Ramdasji expressed his anxiety and said, 'Lord, there is no mode of transporting you there, neither a horse, elephant nor a hand-cart is to be seen. How then can we fulfill your wish ?'

'Pandeji, there is a buffalo in your cattle shed. I will readily sit on it and go. We will leave tomorrow after Rajbhog.'

Sadu Pande, brought his buffalo the following day having put new

cotton mattresses. Then he spread a clean white cloth on it. He placed Shrijibāvā on his shoulders and brought Him down the mountain. He then seated Him comfortably on the buffalo. Sadu Pande and Manek Chand held Him on either side, while Kumbhandas walked ahead and Ramdas at the back.

It was afternoon, when they reached the jungle. The ground was covered with sharp gokharu thorns. These tear your clothes, stick to your body and make you bleed. They somehow managed to reach the middle and make Shriji rest.

It was a cool place, with a seating arrangement, surrounded by kadamb and *tamāl* trees. The lush greenery and soft grass was a very welcome sight. While a cool breeze blew through the spread of the branches, the sky above was dark with the clouds gathering. What an atmosphere !

They spread a mattress and made Shriji rest on it. The first person who did His darshan was Chaturāji. Then Shriji-bāvā said, 'Ramdasji, prepare the food.'



Shriji playing and asking for roti

'Oh ! Graceful one, I had prepared 'mānbhog' (*Sheerā*) and brought it with me.'

Chaturaji in all his simplicity, earnestness and devotion said, 'Prabhu, If you permit me to, may I collect *kankoda* (a green vegetable) from the forest, and cook a special meal for you ?'

Shrijibāvā agreed. After Ramdasji had served Him with *sheera* and vegetable, they all moved away from there, but Shriji told Kumbandas, 'Kumbhan, you will please stay here and sing kirtan, only then I will enjoy eating.'

Shriji and Kumbhan were very intimate friends. They loved as much as they fought. So he sang a verse,
'*Bhāvat hi tohi todko ghano.*'

'Oh Shyāmsundar, you are completely enamoured by this forest! But do you know what we have suffered? These prickly thorns have torn our clothes and made us bleed. Shri Govardhandhar, You are almighty, even Indra had to admit defeat, in front of you. Why then are you scared of that king who is like a jackal ?'

Shriji was very amused when He heard this. After having finished the special meal, He asked Sadu Pande to inquire about the whereabouts of the army.

The news that he heard was, that the *Chobās* (Chaturvedi Brahmins) of Mathura had made the army retreat towards Agra. Shriji said, 'In that case let us go back.' He returned, once again, seated on the buffalo.

That one day, our beloved Shrināthjibāvā spent in the forest was, V. S. 1552, on Shravan sud teras. When Shri Thakorji swings merrily in the '*hindolā*' (swing), and has a meal of *Sheerā* and vegetable.

This place should be a 'must visit' on your itinerary, when you visit Vraj. It is close to Mathura, on your way to Ding. Along with which you must visit Govindkund where Chaturā Nagā's tomb lies.

10. BIG TEMPLE WITH FOUR COURT YARDS

Now we go to a place called Punjab in north India. In this state there is a city called *Ambālā*, where a very



wealthy jeweller lived, His name was Puranmal.

Puranmal was blessed by Shriji, in his dreams one night. Shriji said, 'My temple is very small. I want to live in a bigger temple. You come to Vraj and build one for me.' Puranmal was overjoyed. Being excited, to get started, he reached Anyor with one lakh rupees. There, he related the entire dream sequence to Sadu Pande, who advised him to wait, till Shri Mahāprabhuji arrived. Nothing was possible without Shri Vallabh's consent.

While Puranmal continued to wait for his arrival, Shrijibāvā appeared in Shri Mahāprabhuji's dream and said, 'Leave for Anyor immediately, because Puranmal is waiting there, for you. I have ordered him to construct a big temple for me.'

Shri Mahāprabhuji left his pilgrimage halfway and reached Anyor. After meeting Puranmal and making him a Vaishnav, they discussed the details about the temple. Puranmal said, 'There is an architect named Hirāmani in Agra, who is unparal-

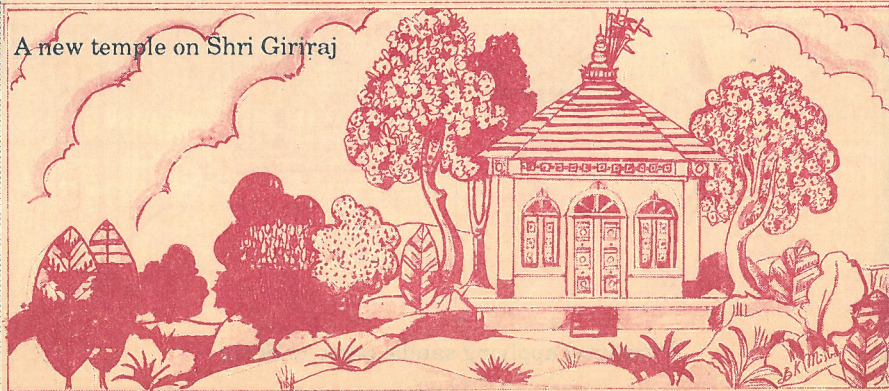
led in the art of temple architecture. Should I send for him?' Shri Mahāprabhuji set to work and had a plan drawn, for the temple. It was started S. V. 1556 on Vaishakh sud treej. Puranmal personally supervised the construction, but midway, the entire amount of one lakh rupees was over.

With an inner spirit to complete the temple, Puranmal went to south India, with Shri Mahāprabhuji's consent. There he earned another one lakh rupees in the diamond business. With this, the temple construction was restarted. Thus it took twenty years to complete the temple.

It was a wonderful work of architectural design. The temple had a peak on which seven flags and a sudarshan chakra was placed. There were four square court-yards inside the temple, *Govardhan chowk, Kamal chowk, Ratna chowk, and Anar chowk.*

In V. S. 1576 on Vaishakh sud treej, there were merry celebrations with gaiety and splendour, because Shrijibāvā was placed inside the new temple.

A new temple on Shri Giriraj



11. PURANMAL IS GRACED

Shri Mahāprabhuji told Puranmal how pleased he was with his devotion. In a rare moment he allowed Puranmal to ask for something.

Puranmal said, 'Maharaj, I am more grateful to you and Shrijibāvē for having graced me and having accepted my sévā. Howerer there is one desire, I wish to fulfill.'

'Please tell me.'

'I want to apply pure sandalwood paste, with my own hands, on my Shriji.'

'You have desired sévā with a pure heart. Shrijibāvē always fulfills a Vaishnav's desire to serve Him in any way. You have the liberty to do this sévā'.

In south India there is a mountain called the *Malaygiri* mountain, which abounds in sandalwood trees. This devotee, travelled there, picked up the best sandalwood sticks and returned. He rubbed the sticks, himself, to prepare a paste. Then he applied it gently, on Shrijibāvē - who was very pleased.

When Shrināthjibāvē graces us, we must always strive to serve Him with unstinted devotion, answering faith and unconditional love.

12. ...GIVE ME SOME

In the area surrounding Shri Govardhan, is *Gulāl kand*, close to which is *Gānthyoli* village. One of Shriji's devotees, who was a Gujar (a tribe) lady, named Pātho, lived here. She used to take fresh curd and butter to offer her dear Shrijibāvē.

One day she had made 'béjar' rotis (made from a mixture of gram flour and wheat flour). She put them in a basket, and carried it for her son, in the afternoon.

Can you guess who she met on the way? Yes, Shrijibāvē. He caught hold of her sari and stopped her, 'Patho, what are you carrying in your basket?'

'Lala, this is 'chhāk' (food) for my son.'

Playful as He was, Shriji pulled the basket from her head and said, 'Let me see, what food is in here?'

'Lala, there is bejar roti and curd.'



Puranmal applying sandal paste to Shriji

Govardhan, is a scene of a vast open area of green pastures and rolling fields! These were of course Shrijibāvā's. There were two young Vaishnavs, Laxman and Harji who took turns to look after those acres of land. Each took his turn to go home at lunch and dinner time, while the other kept watch.

Both these youths were dear to Shrijibāvā. It so happened one day, that Lakhman was delayed at home. Now Harji was famished and in despair. He looked towards the temple and said, 'Devdaman, what am I supposed to do? Laxman has still not returned, and my stomach is rolling with the emptiness. Shriji how can I leave my duty, and go home? Please tell me what I should do?'

Ever merciful Shrijibāvā took out two ladoos from His 'banta' (utencil for ladoos) and took them to Harji personally. He made him eat them.

This Vaishnav was indeed lucky, wasn't he? If you wish to travel back in time, and relive this episode, go to Harji Kund, when you visit Vraj. Harji had it built especially for the cows to drink water from.

Shriji, all merciful and kind, not only looks after the needs of his dearest devotees, who are far, but also of those who are close to Him in sévā.

Sürdāsji was devotion personified. His sévā was to sing in his enthralling voice in front of Shrijibāvā. Like any other day, Sürdāsji sat down with his helper, Gopal, to take his prasād. He asked Gopal to bring water for him. But the boy went out and forgot. Without water to quench his thirst, Sürdāsji's throat became more and more parched. A morsel got stuck and he started gasping for breath. He was close to death, and tried to shout for Gopal.

Shrijibāvā came down the mountain with a jhari. Quietly He placed it near Sürdāsji. He drank the jal (water). Think, how much relief he felt, and who brought him to this state? None other than our most amazing Shrināthjibāvā!

Our Shrijibāvā is novel in His ways of showing affection for devotees and friends. When He is not attend-



ing to their needs, He likes to travel with them, so that He is not separated for even a moment from them.

One of His friends was an innocent boy named Rangeel, who lived in Anyor. He addressed Shriji as 'Pare'. Everyday they both sat together, and ate the meal that Rangeel cooked.

The administrator of the temple sent Rangeel to go to Surat. Pare at once said, 'I am also going to come with you.' Surat is very far from Anyor, and takes more than one month on foot. These two friends set off in the evening, hand in hand, and as night fell, they both fell asleep.

In the morning when they awoke, what did they see in front of them? Surat, they had already reached Surat! Rangeel was bewildered. However they completed their work and started the journey homeward. Once again at night they both rested.

It was morning, and time to proceed to Anyor, but what Rangeel saw was Govindkund! How could they have reached Surat and come back to Anyor in exactly two nights and one day?

This leela is made memorable by the presence of Pare baithakji in Surat till today.

One of Shriji's favourite pastimes in the afternoon, was to play horseback with Govind Swami. Shrijibāvā would make him the horse and ride on his back! On another afternoon, they decided to play hit and run.

Govind Swami ran and touched Shriji. It was automatically, Shriji's turn to run after Govind Swami. What did He do instead? He refused to take his turn and ran away into the temple with His friend chasing Him! Shriji told Shri Gusāiji, 'Govind Swami is running here to catch me.' So Shri Gusāiji did not allow him inside the temple precincts.

It was time for '*shayanbhog*' and Shriji was ready, being hungry after all that play.

Shriji said, 'Call Govind Swami, I feel lonely without him. Only when he sings kirtan, I will eat.'

Have you seen such a bond between friends?



Shriji dining with Rangeel.

15. GOD AT DEVOTEE'S HELP

Tripurdas and Shrināthji, were bound in ties of devoted love. This Vaishnav lived in Agra. He had taken a vow that wherever, Shriji was seen in any form, he would not turn his back. A habit that he had formed, was that of taking Shriji's charanamrut and prasad every single day. Without this he never touched water or food.

Suddenly, he had to go out of town for some work. He had an assistant to prepare meals, but he realized that he had run short of charanamrut and prasad. Tripurdas did not drink water or eat food, and went for work.

The next day, an eight year old boy come to his house. He handed over two bags filled with charanamrut and prasad to the cook and said, 'Tripurdas has sent these bags. When you finish cooking, call Tripurdas.'

The cook went and narrated the entire episode to Tripurdas and then he was convinced that the little boy was none other than Shrināthjibāvā in one of His divine leelas.

Kanhaiyalal was a Vaishnav, who lived in Agra. He only talked to Vaishnavs. One day he decided to go to Dwarka, because Shri Gusāiji was there for a few days. On the way Kanhaiyalal started feeling thirsty, but there was no Vaishnav in sight. He sat under a tree to rest a while.

A short time passed and a cow-herd came and said, 'There is a lake behind you. Go and drink some water.'

Kanhaiyalal was naturally intrigued when he saw the lake, but he drank some water. Soon, the same cow-herd returned and said, 'You must be hungry also. Have Shrināthji's prasad.'

After eating the prasad, Kanhaiyalal lay down to rest. On awaking, he saw the cow-herd standing there. He spoke again, 'You want to go to Dwarka, don't you ? There, Dwarka is in front of you.'

As Kanhaiyalal started walking towards Dwarka, he was sure, that the cow-herd was actually Shrināthjibāvā.



Shrijibāvā had many cows in the cow-shed. An innocent Vaishnav farmer took very good care of the cows. He used to eat the prasād from the temple (*haveli*), and the rest of his time was spent in devotional sévā.

It was the rainy season, and one day the rain poured so heavily and continuously that the entire cow shed was filled with water. The farmer worked right through the day and night to clear the water from the shed and make it dry. He was particularly careful to keep the cows dry. So that they would not get ill because if they did then dear Shriji would not get milk.

All this hard work made him forget about going for prasād, Two days passed, he remained hungry and thirsty, and fell asleep, fatigued. But he found it difficult to sleep on an empty stomach. His condition was aggravated by the cold air, which made him yearn for a warm blanket.

This sight become unbearable for Shriji and He went in the heavy down-pour, in the middle of the night. Shriji took His *jhāri*, *bantā* and black blanket, and reached the shed. He fed his

devotee with the ladoos, made him drink water and then gave him His warm blanket. He slept soundly.

One of Shriji's devotees was Murāri of *Sakarvā* village. He worked in Shrijibāvā's fields, and he was sent prasād from the temple every day. As it happened one day, they forgot to send him prasād, which kept Murari hungry. He started cursing the person responsible for forgetting the prasād. Shriji was secretly enjoying his plight. So he went in the guise of a ten year old boy and met him in the field, He said, 'Murari, you are hungry, there are so many grams (corn) in the field, why don't you eat some ?'

Murari said, 'Boy, these grams belong to Devdaman. We cannot eat them.'

The child replied, 'If you cannot eat them it is your bad luck, but I love grams, please give me some !'

Murari started cursing him and shouted, 'Be sure, that you do not dare to ask for grams again. Next time I will not spare you, I shall hit you.'

Shriji enjoying Veena & Mridang



'How nice, I love both' said Shriji, and took two rotis. 'Now you can take the rest for your son.'

There was a cowherd named Gopāl, who lived in Ading village. This is his story of how he was graced by Shriji !

One day while he was making the cows graze, Shrijibāvā came to the fields. He told Gopāl, that He was very hungry and asked for milk and roti.

Gopāl was naturally very happy, He milked one of his cows and filled a bowl with fresh milk. Since he had brought rotis from his house, he offered it with the milk.

Then Shrijibāvā said, 'Gopāl, you are also a cowherd and so am I. So now everyday you must come to the mountain top for my darshan.'

When Gopāl went everyday for darshan, Shriji would look at him and laugh.

There is a small village called Govardhan in Vraj. It lies at the base

of the Goverdhan mountain. A young girl called *Kshema* lived here, but everyone liked to call her *Khema*. Everyday, when she went to sell curd, she passed '*dān-ghāti*.' What a unique place was this ! It was a narrow path, with a big mountain on one side and thick woods on the other.

As, she walked, one day, Devdaman was standing there, waiting for her. He hooked the pot on her head, with His stick, and tilted it towards Himself. Then He snatched it.

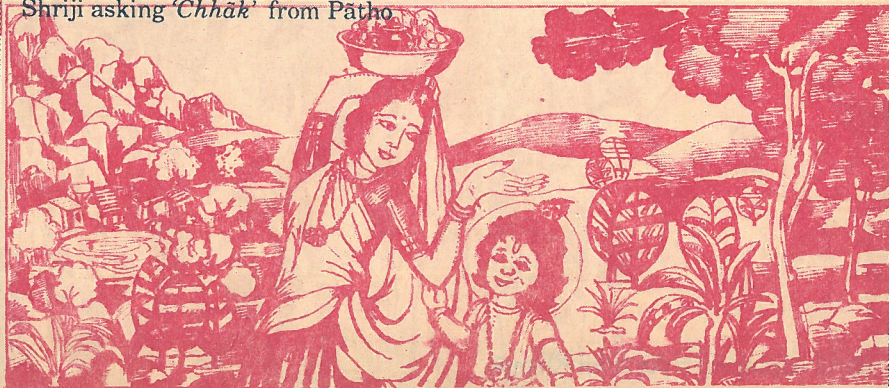
Khema said, 'Lala, why did you snatch the pot ? If only you had asked, I would have gladly given it to you.'

'Khema, if only you understood, how much I enjoy eating, when I snatch from my devotees. But from now, you must remember, when you pass *dān-ghāti*, you will give me two rotis, curd and rice.'

'Lala, whatever makes you happy.'

From that day, Shrijibāvā would eat Khema's curd, rice and roti everyday.

Shriji asking '*Chhāk*' from Pātho



13. SHRIJI IS ENIGMATIC

This time Shriji chose a Brahmin's son, Premnidhi in Agra. One night He appeared in Premnidhi's dream and graced him with His darshan. Then He spoke fondly, 'Prem, I am the *'Thakur'* of Vraj. When will you come for my darshan ?'

The effect this had on him was evident the following morning. He spoke with an adamant and stubborn will, to his parents, insisting that they take him to Vraj that very day.

His parents relented and took him to Mathura. They toured around, and did darshan in every temple. But Prem was dissatisfied and said dependently, 'This is not the thakur of Vraj. None of these appeared in my dream'.

They continued to move around, and reached Goverdhan. They climbed the mountain. On seeing Shrināthji there, Prem's eyes widened and were brimming with tears. They were tears of joy. He stood spellbound and kept looking at Devdaman as if in a trance, and said, 'This is the *thakur* who had appeared in my dream.'

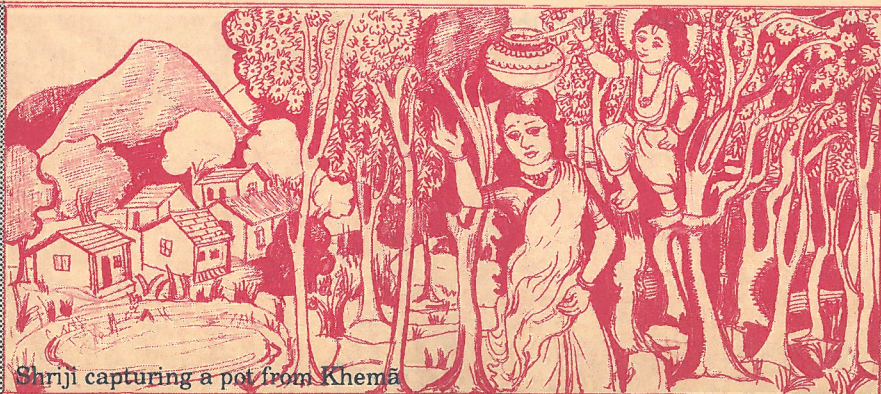
Shriji was also overjoyed to see his friend. In His usual manner, He whispered to him, 'Prem, you and I are dear friends, So stay with me forever.' Premnidhi readily agreed. See, how kind our Shrināthjibāvā is !

Prem's father was wise, so he did not regret his decision. Instead he said, 'He is God's son, so He has kept him.'

•

Māndaliyā Pāndé was a Brahmin and a native of *Sakhitārā* village in Vraj. He had a son, who got married and brought his wife home. The day the new bride stepped in the house, one of their buffaloes got lost. This created a furore among the family members. They cast false accusations and blamed her for the loss, 'This daughter-in-law is unlucky. Today a buffalo is lost, tomorrow we may lose a family member,' they all said.

All this talk made Laxmi the newlywed bride very unhappy. Having heard a lot of stories about Devdaman from her women neighbours, she too decided to keep a vow. She was hopeful, that this calamity which



Shriji capturing a pot from Khemā

had befallen her would soon tide over.

She prayed devoutly, 'Oh, Devdaman ! You are the Almighty, the Creator. If you find our lost buffalo, I will feed you 5 Kgs of butter.'

Devdaman is very merciful. Knowing that Laxmi was innocent, and suffering under false charges, He returned their buffalo within a few days. Everyone in the house rejoiced.

Now, Laxmi's mother-in-law had delegated the task of churning butter to her. Everyday she managed to produce 3-4 Kgs of butter. True to her vow, she would remove 250 gms from this quantity, specially for Shriji. She collected 5 Kgs, and stored it in a vessel. But, the butter she churned one day, was what she took to offer Shriji. Inwardly she prayed to Devdaman, 'I have churned 5 Kgs of fresh butter for you. But it is not possible for me to bring it to you, in front of my in-laws. So please, come here and enjoy it.'

'Shrijibāvā came, took the pot, and went to the forest and licked his hands dry, as He shared the butter

with other friends, and rest to the monkeys of Vraj !

Vraj, where not only cow-herds, but expert musicians also resided. In Ganthgoli village, lived two such musicians. Shyam was the one who played the mridang so well that he was called Shyam pakhwaji. The second one was his daughter Lalita. She excelled in playing the veena. This duo team, played late into the night, once the chores were complete.

Shriji was a lover of music. One night He went to Shyam's house to listen to them filling the air with melodious strains. The whole night was spent, in musical company. When the early morning waking conch was blown, Shriji returned to the temple with bloodshot eyes. Shri Gusāiji noticed them immediately and asked, 'Bāvā, why did you have a sleepless night ?' Shriji told him all about the musical night.

This made Shri Gusāiji send for the father and daughter. He said, 'When Sürdāsji and others sing kirtans near Shrijibāvā, you two will play the mri-



Shriji catches Premnidhi's hand

dang and veena - thus lending music to the words.' Shyam and Lalita played their instruments daily in Shriji's sévā, and made Him joyous.

Only Shrijibāvā sees the depth of his devotees feelings for Him. This is one such leela of a Vaishnav, Rupāji. He used to keep guard, outside Shriji's temple, at night. To prevent himself from falling asleep, he sang loudly in a hoarse voice, but with feeling. When a singer of Govind Swami's calibre heard his voice one night, he told him 'Rupa, Shriji sleeps peacefully at night, so you must not shout yourself hoarse like this.'

Rupa stopped singing at night. When Shri Gusaiji woke up Him in the morning, he noticed, that Shriji's eyes lacked sleep. Shriji told him, 'Rupaji did not sing at night, so how would I sleep?' Shri Gusaiji then ordained Rupaji that he must sing every night.

14. SHRIJI'S SPECIAL FRIENDS

Shriji had His own group of cow-herd friends. They were Krishnadas, Gopinathdas, Gopāl and Gangā.

Shriji shared some of their time in the afternoon. They all played Shriji's favourite games.

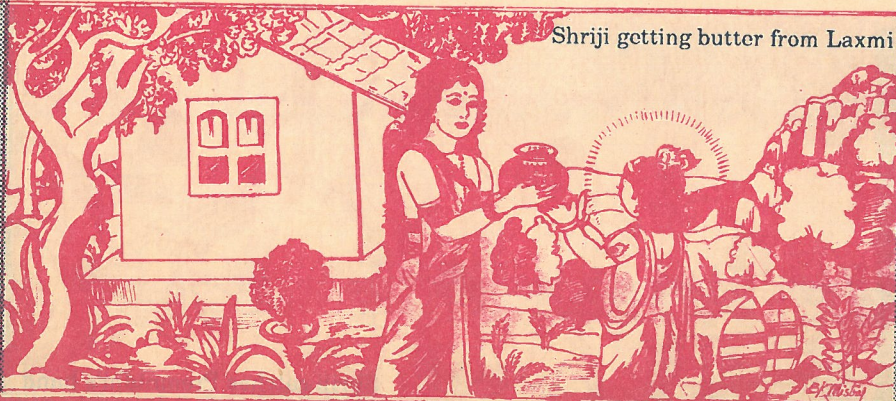
One afternoon, Gopinathdas complained to Shriji, 'Lala, you eat *lādoos* everyday. How about sharing some with us?'

'I promise, that tomorrow I will bring *lādoos* for all of you.'

The following day, Shriji kept his word, and brought eight *lādoos*. He distributed one per friend but Gopinathdas got two in his share. They all were eaten so contentedly, but Gopinathdas put away one *lādoo*, and took it home.

It was evening. Shriji had returned to the temple. Shri Gusāiji received this news, 'Maharaj, we had prepared *lādoos* in the morning for Shriji. Eight *lādoos* are missing, so we think, they have been stolen.'

To remove their suspicioun, Gopinathdas showed them the one *lādoo*, which he had saved. After Shri Gusāiji heard about Shrijibāvā's friends he said, 'From tomorrow, every cow-herd will receive one *lādoo* from Shriji's prasād.'



Shriji getting butter from Laxmi

Dear Shriji, quickly ran from there and went straight to Gusāiji. He said, 'Today Murari has not received prasad. Send it to him immediately.'

How delightfully thoughtful our Shriji is !

16. SHRIJI'S PLAYFUL ANTICS

Kumbhandas was very dear to Shriji. One day He told him, 'Kumbhan, today all my friends are meeting for a big lunche-on feast, where everyone is going to bring one new item of food. The one whose item I like best, will be made number one. Tell me, what you are going to bring ?'

Kumbhandas was living in penury. With no basic provisions like fat and sugar in the house he was indeed saddened and worried. But he said, 'My Lord, whatever you wish to eat, I shall prepare and bring.'

Shriji confided saying, 'I am a trifle bored with eating sweets all day. I am satiated. I simply love bajra *roti*, *teti* (a fruit) and pickle. Along with which, if I have porridge and curd, then it will be a circle of happiness for me.'

Kumbhandas was only too eager to get started. He completed the entire meal-quickly and carried it to *Syāmdhāk*. The other friends had all brought various types of food. Some of these were *bundi*, *jalebi*, *mehsur*, *mohanthal* etc.

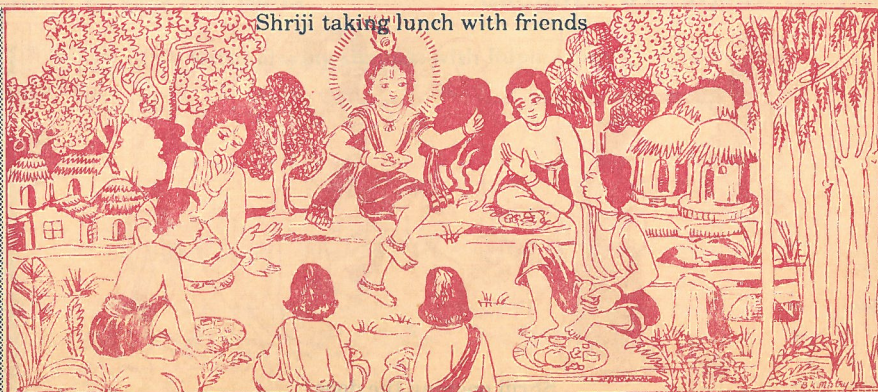
Shriji, went on a tasting spree and as He did so, He kept finding fault with every item. The last one left, was Kumbhandas. First He tasted bajra-roti and teti vegetable. As Shriji ate it, he danced around in the centre, all the time praising it.

This tempted all His other friends and they said, 'Devdaman, give us also a chance to taste it.'

He wagged his thumb teasingly, and kept eating till everything was finished. Then He taunted them and said, 'You really want to taste, then lick my palm !'

Another very amusing incident between Shrijibāvā and Chaturbhujdas, son of Kumbhandas, took place one day.

As usual all the friends had gathered one afternoon, for their daily session of fun and mischief. Shriji-



bāvā was seated in the shade of a tree. That day they had chosen Govind kund. Chaturbhujdas was present but since his wife had died only a month ago, he was very sombre. Shriji kept a straight face and said, 'Chaturbhuj, it is very sad that your wife died. But this mournful face will not be tolerated. You are still young, so why not remarry ?'

Chaturbhujdas refused, while Shriji kept persuading him. Finally He succeeded and for His sake Chaturbhujdās remarried a widow. She was older than him.

Shrijibāvā, ridiculed him in front of the others, 'See ! Chaturbhuj kept refusing for marriage, didn't he ? His wife died only a month back, and he has remarried ! That too, a woman old enough to be his mother. How shameful !'

Such was Shriji's mischief.

One day a king brought his queen for Shriji's darshan. The queen commanded, 'I am in purdah (a veil covering the woman's face), and I do not want to be with other men, lest I am

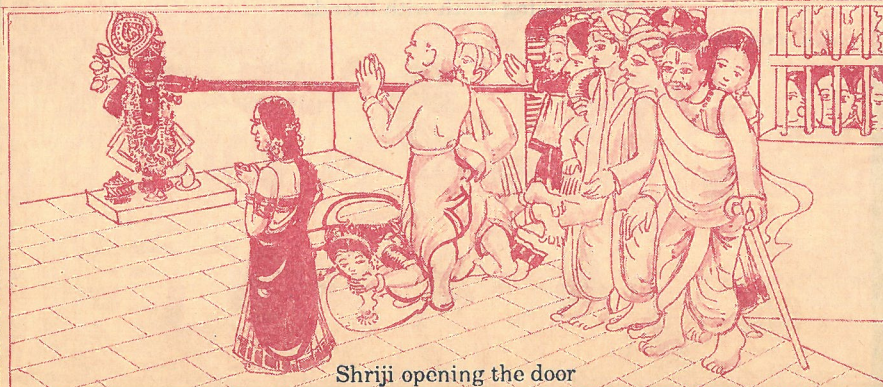
seen. Make such an arrangement that I can get darshan alone.'

The king obliged her by making the necessary arrangements. In the evening, he called his queen, when it was darshan time. While the Vaishnavs waited outside for the doors to open, the queen stood inside for Shriji's darshan.

Shrijibāvā played a trick on her. He opened all the chains with His right hand, The doors were thrown open and the Vaishnavs rushed in. They descended on the queen and surprised her. She was completely lost in that crowd, but with great difficulty found her way out.

Shriji was delighted and said, 'What a foolish woman ! She thought, she would be priveleged, that this is her palace and she can reign here. This is my domain, I rule here and make the laws.'

Shriji's birthday - Janamashtmi - was always celebrated on a grand scale by Shri Gusāiji. Our Shriji wanted to reciprocate his love, so he decided to celebrate his birthday on an equally large scale.



Shriji opening the door

The next day, Magshar vad nom, was his birthday. Shriji summoned Ram-dasji, Sadu Pande and the others and said, 'Tomorrow it is Shri Gusāiji's birthday and it is my wish that you all prepare jalebis and offer them to me. Celebrate it grandly.'

Each one contributed according to his means. Kumbhandas sold his buffaloes, for Rs. 5 which he contributed. Their total collection was Rs. 25. Sadu Pande gave flour, while the ghee and sugar were bought from the money.

Ramdasji cooked right through the night, so that they could celebrate the next day. They served Shriji basketful of jalebis, and Kumbhandas sang kirtans.

They all enjoyed that day.

17. PLEASURE SEEKER SHRIJI

Shriji not only had favourite outdoor pastimes, but indoor games as well.

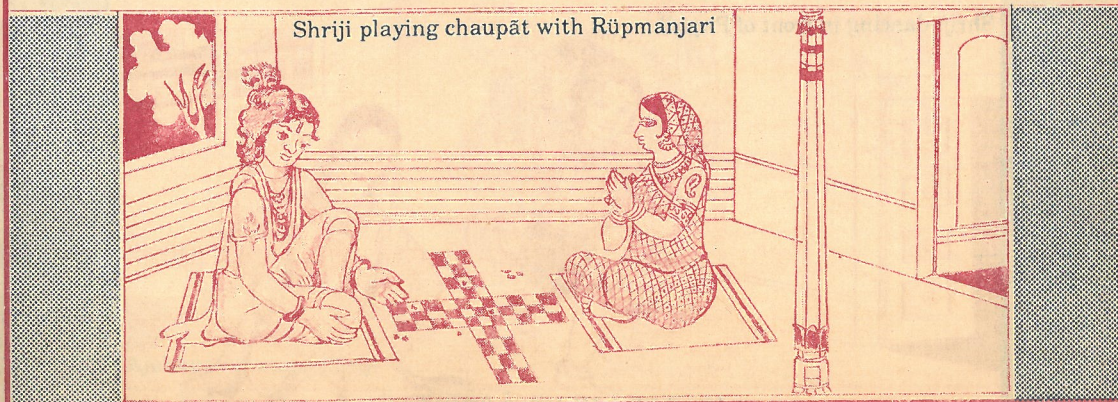
Gwalior is a city of historical importance. It is in the state of Madhya Pradesh, and that is where we will go with Shriji, to see His leela.

A Kshatriya family lived in this city. They were Shri Gusāiji's followers. They had a very pretty daughter, Rüp Manjari. She excelled at playing chaupat. She was an ardent devotee of Shriji and visited the temple everyday for darshan.

One night, Shriji came to her house. That her beloved Shrijibāvā was actually standing in front of her, drove her nearly mad with happiness. He said, 'Rüp, you are a very good chaupat-player. I have come especially to play with you. Let us get started.'

Rüp Manjari set the game on the carpet, and arranged the dice. Then she laid a mattress to sit on. They both sat facing each other and took turns in rolling the dice. It became a game of light hearted fun. If Shriji won one game, Rüp won the next game. This play engrossed them the whole night. At the break of dawn, Shrijibāvā returned to the haveli.

Emperor Akbar's *Sūba* (governor) lived in Mahāvan, near Gokul. His name was Alikhan Pathan and his daughter's Peerjadi. They both were



Shri Gusāiji's followers. Shriji graced this talented girl often. Since she was an accomplished dancer, Shriji often went to her house, sat down, and made her dance.

Peerjadi would go into raptures when ever she danced to please Him, because Shriji would give the beat ! But will Shrijibāvā stop at this ? He would also join her in dancing. Some times, she used to play the mridang and He would dance !

Wouldn't you love to see a sight like this !

One such devotee was Emperor Akbar's wife Tajbibi. She had mastered the game of chess. Shriji liked to go to her palace and play a game of chess with her. Never mind, that her palace was in Agra. But what tearful scenes, when Shriji would leave to go back ! Tajbibi found the separation unbearable.

This queen was the Emperor's favourite. How could he ignore her inner emotional turmoil, He agreed to take her to Vraj for Shriji's darshan. It was a colourful festival season, with merry-making and colours flying in

the air. The Holi festival was on when the royal couple reached Vraj. Amidst this air of festivity, Taj climbed up to the mountain top in time for Rajbhog darshan.

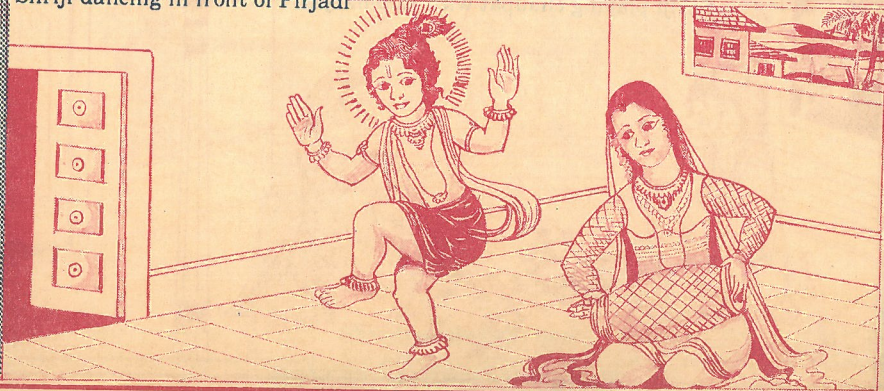
She saw a wonderful darshan. Shriji was being coloured with abeel, gulal, sandalwood, kesuda and kum kum. Taj was in raptures and an irresistible urge to sing made her chant this kirtan, '*bahori dafa bājan lage hori.*' With these words she was also inspired to play holy with her beloved Shriji. In this state of anxiety of separation, she fainted. Her kirtan which remained incomplete, was sung by Shriji !

Shrijibāvā knows everyone's feelings and thoughts. When He does not come to you, He calls you to him.

This is perhaps one of Shriji's most touching and heart-wrenching leelas. We go into a historical setting.

Udaipur is in the state of Rajasthan. The Aravali range surrounds a village called Sinhād, which is a short distance from Udaipur. The ruler of this city, at that time was, Mahārānā Uday Sinhji, from the

Shriji dancing in front of Pirjādi



same ruling family of Maharana Pratap. Since his ancestral rule, the Mughal Kings had repeatedly attacked to conquer their state. The battle for Udaipur continued relentlessly. To safeguard the security of his family, King Uday Sinh took them to Sinhād. It was comparatively safer.

It was at that time, that Shri Gusāiji decided to break journey at Sinhād on his way to Gujarat. The King and his family heard about Shri Gusāiji's stay, and went together for his darshan. Mirābai, an unparalleled devotee of Shri Krishna, was married into this princely family.

She had a younger sister, Ajabkunvari. This unfortunate soul was also a daughter-in-law of this family, but she was a child-widow. When she saw Shri Gusāiji, she became his follower immediately. Kind and knowledgeable as Shri Gusāiji was, he told Ajabkunvari, some of Shriji's heart-capturing leelas. This was enough to make her pine for Shriji's darshan, and because her wish was unfulfilled, she kept fainting. Especially to give her darshan, Shriji rode to Sinhād in a buffalo-driven chariot!

Ajabkunvari was also an excellent *chaupat* (chess) player. Shrijibāvā played with her throughout the afternoon. As usual, He has to part company, after some time, so He got ready to leave for Vraj. Ajabkunvari was desperate to hold Him back, so she caught His dress firmly.

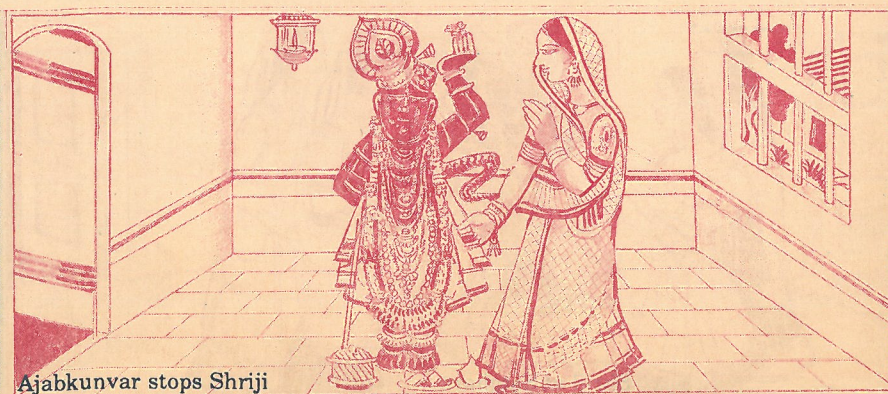
Shriji explained gently : 'Be content, because I will come every afternoon to play chaupat with you. After a few years I will come and settle in your house forever.'

Today, the place where Shriji is enshrined in Nathdwārā, is Ajabkunvar's house.

18. SHRIJI DEMANDS THE NOSE-RING

Shriji has a unique style of getting His way. Shri Gusāiji had a house in Mathura, which is called 'Sat Ghara' even today. As it so happened, once Shri Gusāiji went to Gujarat and made his oldest son, Shri Girdharji responsible for Shriji's sévā.

Shriji said, 'Girdhar, you have never once shown me your house. I want to see it tomorrow. Let us leave for Mathura.'



Ajabkunvar stops Shriji

Shri Girdharji was only too pleased to obey. After getting the chariot ready for Shriji, he carried Him down the mountain, placed Him in the chariot and left for Mathura.'

This surprise was a source of joy for all. It was Māgh vad sātām. They prepared a delicious meal of *kheer* and *kharmanda*, and offered it to Shriji. After which they coloured Him with abeel-gulāl. To show their unlimited fondness for Shriji, the old and young members of the family offered their jewellery. They also offered whatever money they had collected, as 'bhet.'

There was a young betiji in the house, whose gold nose-ring was very dear to her. She did not offer it to Shrijibāvē. But Shriji was not to be outdone, and said, 'I want this betiji's nose-ring.'

Shri Girdharji made her part with her nose-ring and then offered it to Shrijibāvē.

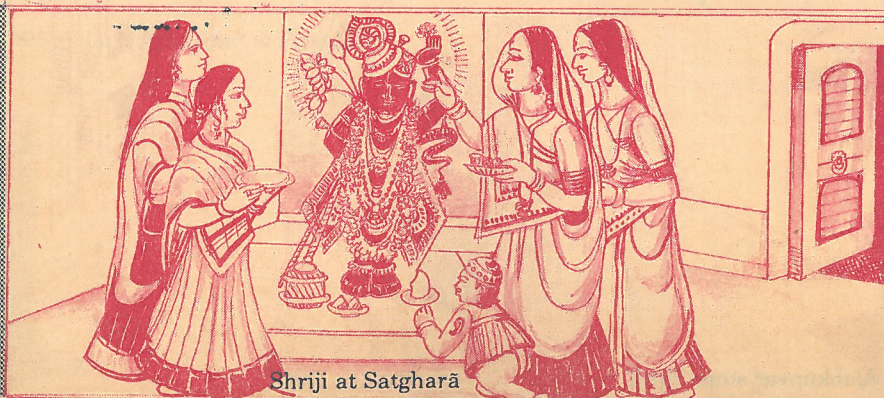
He stayed with this family for two and half months. Then on Vaishākh sud chaudas He returned to Govardhan mountain.

19. IN 'VIRAH' OF SHRIJIBĀVĀ

'Virah' is the most apt word for the state or the frame of mind that a devotee experiences, when separated from Shrijibāvē. This distance, when the eyes cannot get darshan of Shriji, produces anxiety in the mind of a devotee. It creates listlessness and physical ailments of a perplexing nature. Shriji sees his devotees suffering in virah, and then chooses the best path for them.

Chaturbhujdas was rendering kirtans in Vraj. He could not stay a moment without Shrijibāvē. It was Māgh vad 7, when he came to the *haveli* in the morning for darshan. On hearing that his beloved Shrijibāvē was in Mathura, he started experiencing pangs of *virah* !

Very saddened and utterly dejected, he walked down slowly from the mountain top close to tears. He sat down at Govind kund, and let his emotions flow down his cheeks. In between spasms of tears, he sang kirtans of virah. When he noticed that the cows had returned from grazing and Shriji was not with them, he cursed silently. Every evening he



Shriji at Satgharā

sang this verse while he waited,
*'Shri Govardhanvāsi sanvro Lāl
Tum bin rahyo na jāy.'*

– 'Oh you dark coloured lala, living in Govardhan mountain, I cannot live without you.'

While Shrijibāvē spent his two and half months in Mathura with Shri Girdharaji's family, his devotee's condition worsened in Govardhan. He started looking emaciated, and without any intake of food and water, become very weak. It was then that he heard, on Vaishakh sud chaudas evening, that Shriji was back.

Just news, and see a devotee's reaction ! His body suddenly seemed charged with energy as he rushed towards the haveli !

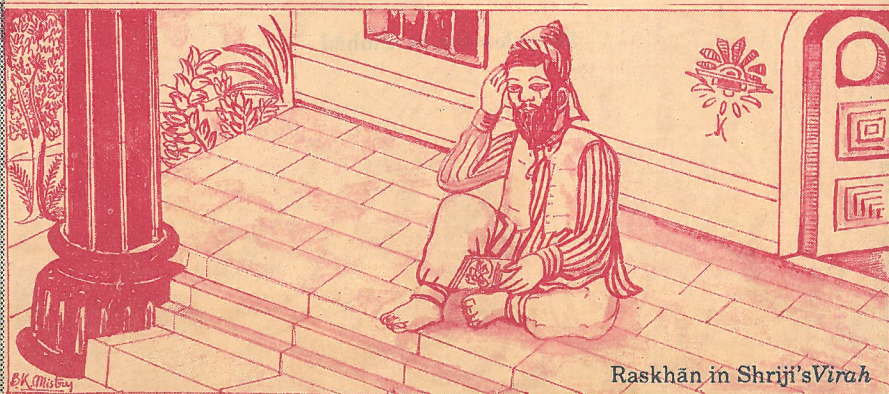
20. SHRIJI'S UNENDING LEELAS

Now that Shriji was back in Vraj, all the Vrajvasis were very happy. there was a Pathan named Raskhān. who lived in Delhi. He left his family, and reached Govindkund. He became a devout devotee of Shriji and settled in Vraj. He composed his verses according to the leela's he saw Shriji's divine form, perform !

The Vrajvasis look turns in offering pots full of milk, curd and butter to Shriji. He loved to eat what they offered and often said, 'I love to eat the milk, curd and butter that the Vrajvasis bring for me.'

But one day, the big vessel of curd did not reach Shriji. He went to Baroli Village and reached Shobhā Gujri's house and said, 'Shobhā, give me curd.' Shobhā replied, 'Lala, if you bring a big bowl, I will give you curd.' So Shriji brought a gold bowl from the temple. Shobha filled it to the rim and how Shriji lapped it with each mouthfull !

Is Shriji content with one devotee's offering ? In exactly this manner, He went to Petho village where Lachchho Gujri lived. She was on her way with her son's meal of rice and curd. Shriji as you know, relishes this meal. He stopped her suddenly at Govindkund and gave her the gold bowl, which he had brought from the haveli. Laachcho filled it for Him with rice and curd, and then Shriji walked up merrily, and ate with content!



Raskhān in Shriji's Virah

21. WONDER FOR 'AJAB'

Shrināthji and Ajabkunvari. The bond between the Lord Almighty and His devotee. A promise was made and here is that amazing leela to keep that promise.

It was around V.S. 1725, approximately 225 years ago, to date. Shriji had been in Vraj for 200 years and brought unabounded joy and happiness to the Vrajvasis.

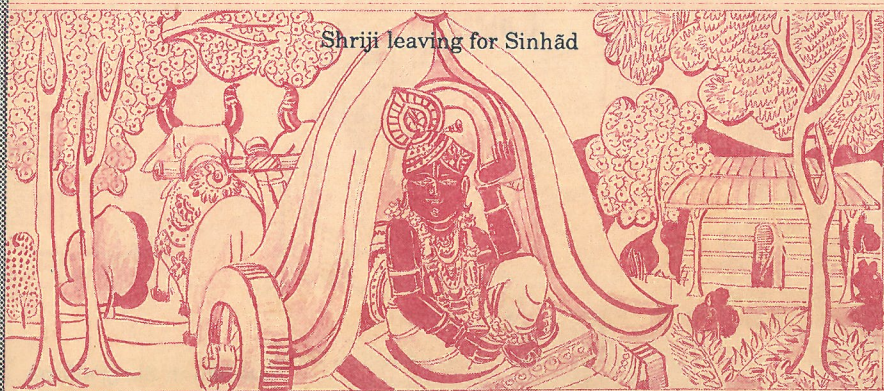
Now it was time to fulfill the promise that He had made to Ajab. It was also a period of tyranny and oppression under the mughal ruler Aurangzeb. His rule was merciless, because he was obsessed with converting his subjects to Muslims. He ordered destruction of Hindu temples and idols. His army spread fear and mass hysteria all around, while the commander-in-chief of his army, reached Mathura with his army. He struck down and razed to the ground, an old famous temple of Shri Keshav Raiji. This created a furore and a militant atmosphere in Vraj.

The next target was Gokul. At that time Shri Gusāiji's oldest son Shri Girdhaji's family line was in charge

of all the temple affairs. His name was Shri Dauji (Shri Damodarji) and his age, only 15 yrs. Hence his paternal uncle Shri Govind Raiji, was acting on his behalf and looking after Shriji and the haveli. On reaching there the chief of the army, met them and said, 'You are a Goswami. Show me a miracle, because only then I will not destroy Shriji's temple to ruins.'

When this challenge was thrown openly to His devotees, Shrijibāvā pacified Shri Govind Raiji and said, 'Whatever happens, does so because of my will. I want to fulfill Ajabkunvar's promise, and go to Sinhād. That is the express reason for this leela. Tonight, you will put me on the chariot, and quietly leave this place. Where so, I will desire, to stop. The chariot will go in that direction. You walk alongside my chariot. Do not worry about anything.'

Everything was ready, and once Shriji was settled in, it was time to depart. But the bullock-cart would not move one step forward. This puzzled Shri Govind Raiji and he asked Shrijibāvā why the chariot was not moving. So He said, 'I have graced my



Shriji leaving for Sinhād

devotee Gangābāi. Now she is old. Make her sit in another bullock cart and bring her along.'

When Gangābāi was ready, the wheels started moving ! It was V.S. 1726, Āso sud 15th, a Friday, when Mahadevji, disguised as a mendicant, carried a 'mashāl' (a flame) as He walked ahead, to show the path.

22. MY LIFE FOR SHRIJI

Shriji left Vraj, but the Mughals did not accept defeat. Their army chief, accompanied by 200 soldiers, arrived in Govardhan with the solitary aim of tearing down the temple.

Two Vaishnav Vrajvasis, Sévak and Subhadra, were present, only to see the disaster that was to befall them. They were dear to all the Vrajvasis. They decided, 'We will do or die, but on no account will we let them succeed in reaching the mountain or the precincts of our temple.'

The troops had reached Anyor. As soon as they spotted the seven flags on the temple peak, they were ready to attack. Sévā and Sabhā, the two faithful Vrajvasis, invited them to march forward, and lunged towards

them to fight, for their beloved Shriji. They wounded many and killed many of the soldiers. The rest, beat a hasty retreat. Sévā and Sabhā spared the army chief by keeping him alive but threatened him, 'Go, and tell your emperor, never to attack or come near this place, again.'

Not to be intimidated by this threat, the commander-in-chief, returned with an additional armed force, just a few days later. Once again Sévā and Sabhā were up in arms to face them boldly. But this time they had a pleasantly wonderful surprise. Shriji came and stood beside them. He said, 'I am very very happy with both of you. Now there is no need for you to show your strength. These Muslims will not be able to move a stone from here.'

The soldiers reached Anyor. But they just could not see the temple ! Dejected, they had to return, unsuccessful, without any warfare.

Sévā and Sabhā were seriously wounded, in their courageous effort to protect Shriji. They died for Shrijibāvē.

Sévā and Sabhā fighting with army



Krishnadas was Kumbhandas' second son. He was the cow-herd for Shriji's cows. One evening, he was on his way home, after having made the cows graze. Suddenly they were confronted by a ferocious lion. That fierce lion's presence made the cows run helter-skelter. But there was one old cow, who was unable to make the escape, since she was heavy. The lion took a leap towards her. This was Shriji's cow and it had to be saved ! So Krishnadas took a lightning jump, and thrust his head into the lion's open jaws. He died to save Shrijibāvā's cow !

23. ANNAKÜT CELEBRATED IN AGRA

On their way to Sinhad. Shriji ordered that His chariot be stopped at Agra. He rested in a haveli. Shri Navneetpriyaji joined Him in Agra, from Gokul. Shriji said, 'I want to celebrate Annakut here.'

Preparations were underway and on Kartak sud ekam, very discreetly; the Govardhan puja was performed. In the Annakut meal, white parched grain was substituted for 'sakhdi' (rice).

Shrijibāvā is omnipotent and omniscient. He stayed in Agra for a month, but in a very unpretentious manner. This ploy worked, because the emperor's soldiers were still on His trail, and they had reached Agra. Despite several attempts to find our Shriji, they returned empty handed.

On Kartik Pürnimā Shrijibāvā said, 'Gangābāi, now we shall proceed towards Gwalior, which is in M. P. There is a ravine in the Chambal valley, which has deep thick forests. In this area is located a very picturesque spot called Dando-ti-dhār. We will all go there for a few days.

They drove the chariot to the place, as indicated by Shrijibāvā.

24. A MIRACLE NEAR CHAMBAL

Aurangzeb was in hot pursuit of Shriji. It made him send one of his officers with his troops, to follow Him, because he had heard that they had left Agra.

In the meantime, Shriji's chariot had reached the Chambal river, so they rested awhile. Then Gangābāi said with a worried look 'Shriji, the soldiers are coming nearer, what are we going to do.



Shriji replied nonchalantly, 'Do not worry about that. You start preparing for *utthāpan*.'

The army was now positioned exactly opposite to them, across the river ! Then the miracle happened !

The soldiers saw high mountains instead of the chariot ! All the people appeared like big lions ! They did not see a single person ! The most natural reaction on seeing such a vast number of lions, is to run for your life; which is what the army did.

Now the Vaishnavs were safe. So on the second day, Shriji said, 'There is a village called Krishnapur across the river which is also known as Dando-ti-dhār. Take me there, for I wish to stay awhile in that place.'

A true devotee of 'Shrijibāvē is always fearless.

25. SHRI VRAJRAJI'S SÉVĀ

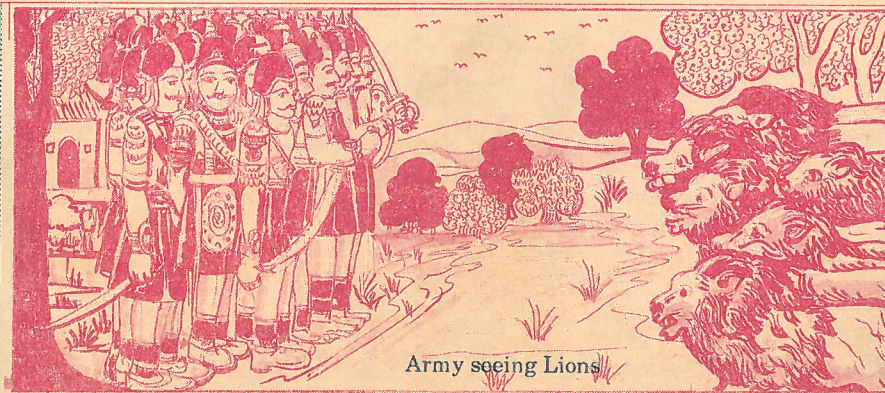
Shri Gusāiji's third son's name was Shri Balkrishnaji. Shri Vrajrāiji was in his family tree.

Once after Janmashtami, i.e. on the next day, on Nandmahotsav, Shri Balkrishnaji experienced a feeling of Shri Jashodaji within himself. So

with those divine thoughts and ardour, he swung Shri Navnitlal in the '*palna*'. This pleased Shri Gusāiji so much that he asked Shri Balkrishnaji for blessings. The reply that he got was, 'On every Janmashtami I want to feel these same ardent emotions and enthusiasm and I want Shriji's sévā permanently.'

But Shri Gusāiji was unable to grant both the blessings and said, 'You will experience Shri Jashodaji's feelings and emotions, but the second blessing has been granted only to your eldest brother Shri Girdharji and to his bloodline. However, Shri Vrajrāiji will be born in your family. He will have the privilege of doing Shriji's sévā for three weeks.

Shri Vrajraiji learned about this. He contacted the King and asked for assistance, then left for Dando-ti-dhar. Shriji, anticipating his arrival said, 'Gangābāi, tell Shri Govindraiji that Shri Gusāiji's promise has come. Now Shri Vrajraiji will do my sévā. Till then, I ask you all to go to a village which is about 50 K.M. from here. Stay there, until such time, that I think fit to call you back.'



Can any of you imagine, what all those devotees' condition must have been, on hearing this ? But they had to go. While Shri Vrajraji did Shrijibāvā's sévā with utmost devotion, zeal and love, for 27 days, as ordained; Shri Govind Raiji spent that time disguised as a monk, in deep *virah*. Immediately, on the 28th day, he returned, and Shri Vrajraji handed over the responsibility.

Shrijibāvā spent the entire 4 months of the monsoon season in Dando-ti-dhar near Gwalior. After this, He instructed His dear devotee Gangābāi to take the chariot towards Kota. Blessed indeed was Shri Vrajraji, to have the opportunity of doing exclusive sévā of Shrinathji-bāvā, for 27 days.

26. SHRIJI LIKES LOTUS

The chariot was headed towards Kota, where Anirudhsinh was the King. Being a Vaishnav, he was exalted, to know that Shriji was on His way to his kingdom ! He left no stone unturned, to greet Shriji. With all the pomp and fanfare befitting them. He made Shriji stay at Padmasheela, at a

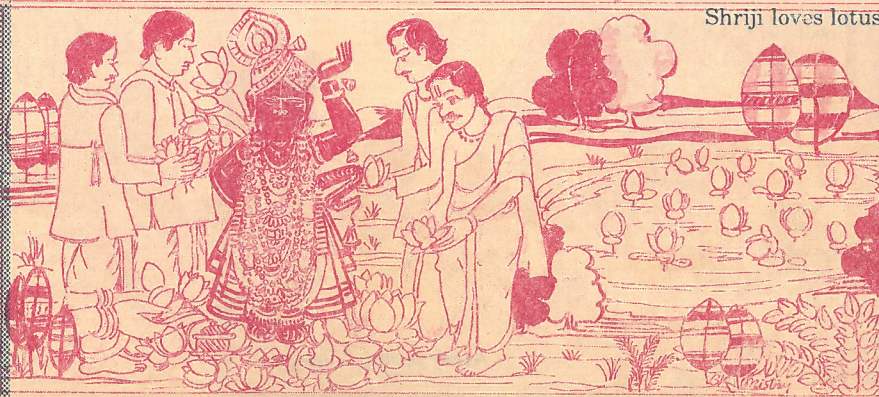
place called Krishna Vilās, close to Kotā.

The King, in a state of complete sévā towards the Shrijibāvā, urged Shri Govindraji, 'Please, make such an arrangement, that Shriji stays here forever. I have five thousand Rajput soldiers who are in the spirit of service and sacrifice towards Shrijibāvā. They will oppose the Emperor and fight.'

'Sir, for the present Shriji is going to reside here. The question of a permanent residency, is something which only Shriji will decide.'

Shriji's stay in Kota lasted for four months. From there, He expressed a desire to go to Jodhpur.

The road to Jodhpur, passes by Ajmer. Close by is the famous holy place Pushkar, and it has a big lake. It was filled with lotus flowers, whose fragrance spread all around and filled the air, which reached Shriji. His chariot stopped some few feet away from this enchanting lake. Shrijibāvā asked Gangābāi to bring some lotus flowers, without which His chariot would not proceed.



They all rushed to bring lotus flowers. The Vrajvasis picked up white and pink coloured lotuses.

These, Shri Govindraiji and his family offered Shriji which made Him content. The chariot moved ahead.

27. SHRIJI CELEBRATES 'VASANTOTSAV'

After Ajmer, the next closeby town is Kishanghar. On His journey, Shriji graced so many kings and queens. The princely ruling family of Kishanghar had also been Vaishnavs for many generations. The King in that era was Raja Mānsinh. He equalled the other Kings, in his royal reception of Shrijibāvā.

But Shriji chose a naturalistic spot to rest. It was a village, called Ajmiti, very close to Kishanghar. This heavenly site was beautified by tall mountains, trees spread out over a vast area. Moreover there was a lake !

Nature in its pristine purity, was the ideal place for Shriji to stay. It also gave Raja Mansinh the tranquil atmosphere, to bask in Shriji's darshan. Once again, Shri Govind Raiji heard the same request, this

time from this King. 'If Shriji settled here, then I will stop at nothing to make Shrijibāvā comfortable by doing his sévā.'

Shri Govind Raiji understood these words only too well and placated Raja Mansinh, 'Your intent is of the highest kind, but Shriji will stay here only till Dolotsav. This setting is most conducive for *Vasantotsav*, and so it is Shriji's wish.'

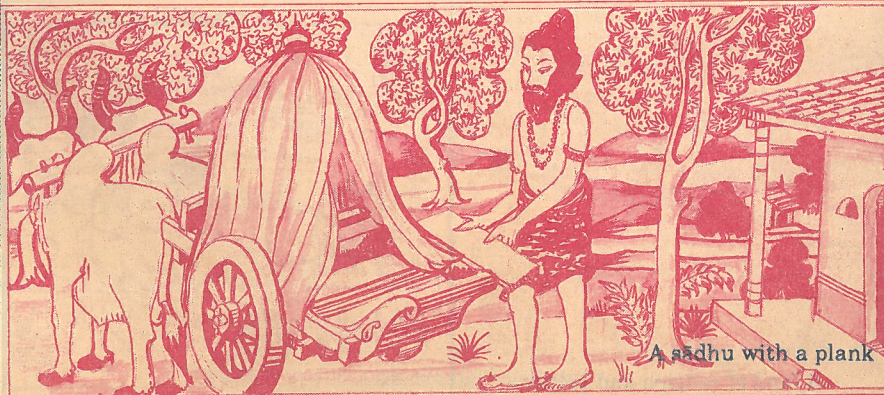
Shrijibāvā graced the king and his family till the month of Chaitra.

28. SHRIJI GRACES AN ASCETIC

Shriji's next halt was at Vilaspur. There was a Guru and disciple ascetic team, who lived in this village. They left for a Vraj yatra.

In Vraj they went to Shri Giriraj, and the Guru went to the mountain top for Shrināthji's darshan. But the disciple preferred to wait down, because he considered Shri Giriraj as God in His divine form. So he had to return to his village, very disappointed and unhappy, without Shriji's darshan.

Such a devotee was not going to be forgotten by Shriji. When He



reached their village, He appeared in the disciple's dream and said, 'You are regretting and are dejected because you did not get darshan in Giriraj. I am that same one, whose darshan you are pining for. Listen to me carefully. Tomorrow my chariot will pass through the plains on the outskirts of your village. At that time, you will stop my chariot, and request Shri Govind Raiji for darshan. If he poses too formidable, then tell him, Shriji is wearing a white pagh and *pichorā* shringar, and He is in this chariot.

When you come for my darshan, you must bring a wooden plank with you. When I am dining at Rajbhog time, I feel very uncomfortable. So I will use that plank everyday to eat during Rajbhog.

The ascetic disciple hardly slept that night, and before the birds could be heard in the morning air, he got up. Quickly, he got dressed and went to the carpenter to have that special wooden plank made, in exchange for which he gave him a buffalo. Now he was anxiously waiting for Shriji's chariot to pass by. His waiting was rewarded in the evening.

He prostrated before the chariot, actually to Shriji, and then told Shri Govind Raiji the facts. He described Shriji's shringar. Then Shri Govind Raiji made this true devotee, do Shriji's darshan, and then accepted the plank from him.

The following day, Shriji, used that same plank at *Rajbhog*. However when they moved on, the Vaishnavs didn't take the plank with them; they forgot it, which deeply saddened the ascetic. The chariot had reached 7 kms. away from Vilaspur, it stopped. Shriji said to Gangābāi, 'My plank has been left behind, that I use to eat at Rajbhog time. Send someone to bring it, else we will not move forward. You will serve me Rajbhog only on that plank.'

They some *sévakas* ran to bring that board, and the journey continued. To date, that ascetic's board is still present at Shrināthdwara.

29. SHRIJI IN CHĀMPĀSĒNI

Rajasthan conjures a vivid picture of heroism, valour, princes and tales of Rajput warriors. It is synonymous with Dharma.



A land of religion and valour



A beautiful scene

Jodhpur is a historic city in this illustrious state. Close by is a village called Chāmpāsēni, which has a dense forest of *kadamb* trees. Shriji chose this spot, to stay awhile.

The ruler of Jodhpur then was Maharaj Jaswant Sinhji. He was away, visiting his maternal uncle's family, when news of Shriji's arrival reached him, he rushed back to Jodhpur. He went to for Shriji's darshan, which livened his spirit. Shriji stayed there for four months.

Shriji reminded Shri Govind Raiji, 'In Mewar near Udaipur, there is a place called Sinhād. Ajabkunvar lived there and I had promised her that I will stay in that house forever. So we will go directly in that direction from here.'

Reaching Udaipur, meant a meeting with its ruler, Rana Raisinh. Shri Govind Raiji expressed Shriji's wish when they met and the king took him to the Queen Mother (*Rājmātā*). She quickly consented with the following words, in a truly befitting manner, 'We are indeed fortunate, to have had Ajabkunvar in our family. You must leave immediately and bring Shriji here, if we have to sacrifice our lives

for Shrijibāvā, no member of Rānā Pratap's family, will hesitate, or think twice to do so.'

The Rana in his turn, requested Shri Govind Raiji, 'Please bring Shriji to us right away. We surrender our heart, mind and soul in His sévā.'

That auspicious day was samvat 1728 Kartik sud Pūnam, when Shriji went to Mewār.

30. SHRIJI LIBERATES GHOSTS

Shriji and His followers had to have an over night stay at a village, on their way to Sinhād. That location had a crystal clear lake. Its water was clean and drinkable. So Shriji had some to drink. Later that night, there were loud voices hailing Shriji ! But no one was to be seen.

Shri Govind Raiji sought a way of finding out and shouted loudly, 'Who are you and why are you shouting ?'

'We are ghosts and spirits, and we live in this lake. Today Shrijibāvā drank the water from this lake, and so He has graced us. Now we are liberated, and we will attain salvation. Before we go to Vaikunth, we want to glorify our Saviour, Shrijibāvā.' ●



Ghosts hailing Shriji

31. A RECEPTION IN MEWAR

Shriji's entire journey in His chariot extended for 2 Years, 5 months and 7 days. This covered, 1 month in Agra; 2 months on the road; 4 months in Gwalior, Dando-ti-dhar; 2 months on the road, 4 months in Kota, 2 months on the road, 3 months in Kishanghar, 2 months on the road, 5 months in Champaseni, 2 months in Udaipur and 2 months in Sinhad. Thus a total of 29 months was spent in His chariot.

From Chāmpāsēni, it took Shriji 23 days to reach Mewar. When they arrived at Sinhad village, the chariot was halted, under a peepal tree. Shriji said, 'Ajabkunvar lived here. I am now going to settle here.'

Shri Govind Raiji said simply, 'But Rana Raisinh has strong wish, that you go to Udaipur.'

'I shall fulfill his wish. My promise to Ajabkunvar still holds more importance. This environment here reminds me of Vraj and hence it is very dear to me.'

As per Shriji's wishes, Shri Govind Raiji, asked Gopaldas Mistry to draw

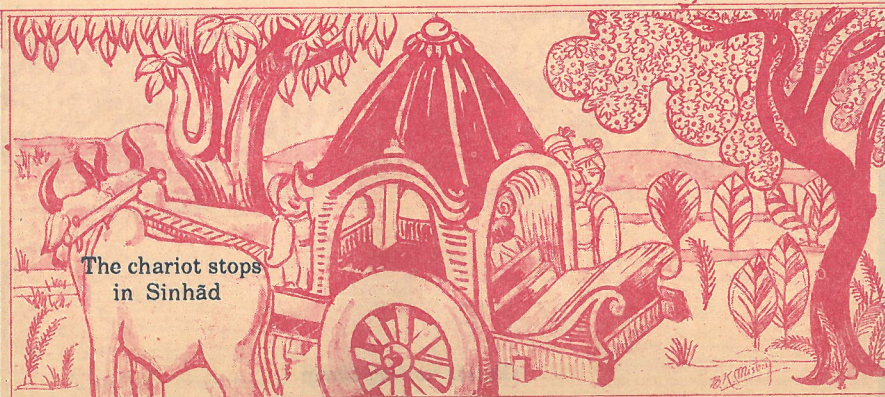
a design of a shrine. After seeing a good muharat, the foundation stone was laid. The Shrine was completed in a short period of 2 months. It was in 1728. The day was Magh vad satam. Shriji was enshrined into the new temple. This day is celebrated as 'Shrināthji's Pātotsav.'

When you visit Nathdwara, can you see the chariot in which our Shrijibāvā travelled from Vraj. It is preserved in Shri Govardhan chowk.

32. SHRIJI'S AFFECTION FOR DEVOTEES

Now Shrināthjibāvā's journey had ended. He had reached His destination. But the cruel king Aurangzeb was not one to give up his hunt. His spies had fanned out, looking for traces of footprints, which would lead them to Shrijibāvā. Instead they heard that Shriji had already reached Mewar, and also that He was going to live there. The emperor acted at once with this news. He sent a large number of battalions to Sinhad.

They had reached the outskirts of this place. Their camp had been set up at Raisagar near Kankroli village.



The chariot stops in Sinhād

To accept this open challenge as a battle-cry, Rana Raisinhji, with his choicest, well-trained and brave soldiers, got ready to attack. His battalion consisted of 40,000 men. In response, the Mughal emperor's army also advanced.

Now they had halted at Khimnor, close to Sinhad. The king took a liking to the place and ordered his subjects to build a garden within a month, and decided to stay on till it was ready. This development in events, put Rana Raisinhji in a dilemma.

While in Sinhad, Shriji was instructing Gangābāi, 'Close by is a small village called Batra. There too, is a forest of my liking. So I would like to stay there for 3 days, and finally end a *Rishi's tapasya* of many years. He has been controlling his life breath with Yogic exercises, and has been waiting for my darshan, for far too long.'

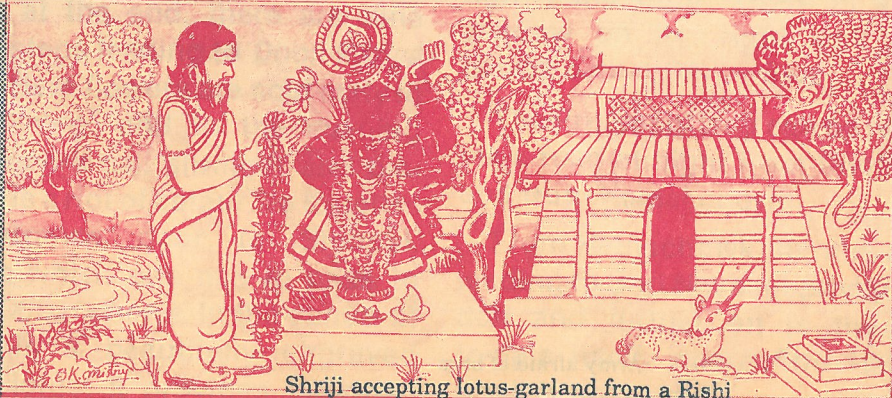
Once the chariot was ready, Shriji went to Batra village, and stayed in the forest, on the mountain. The sage came for Shriji's darshan. He had acquired yogic powers, to be able to

attain heaven. He used these for Shriji's sévā, by bringing lotus flowers, and weaving a necklace. When he took it with him to Shriji-bāvā, He said, 'Now you make me wear this necklace with your hands' The rishi did as asked, with abundant joy, peace and contentment in his heart.

In addition to this, Shriji also received a piece of the highest quality of sandalwood. This sandalwood, was so strong, that if it was placed in a vessel of hot boiling oil, that oil would become cool.

Till this block of sandalwood lasted. every summer, its paste was offered to Shriji, in a bowl.

After Shriji spent 3 days, to fulfill a sage's penance, He made a miraculous leela happen in His Shrine. One day suddenly, a swarm of bees came out in droves, from the temple and buzzed towards Khimnor. They attacked the Mughal emperor's army and stung them in so deadly a manner, that they ran to save themselves, forgetting all sense of duty. In this stampede, the king's two wives-queens Rangi and Changi got sepa-



Shriji accepting lotus-garland from a Rishi

rated, and were eventually captured by the Rana's soldiers. The king, true to their family honour and tradition treated both the queens like his sisters. After having provided for their meals, and security, he had them escorted back to their King.

This aristocracy on Rana's behalf, compelled the emperor to promise him, 'As long as this amazing and miracle God from Vraj will reside in Your kingdom, I will never attack it.' With this promise the emperor turned back, with his army.

The other king, Raisinh, on his behalf, gifted Shriji, Sinhad and plenty of other surrounding villages.

33. SHRIJIBĀVĀ IN GHASYĀR

60 years passed, since Shrijibāvā settled in Sinhad. Parellel to this, interesting events, which were to affect Sinhad were taking place.

In V.S. 1858, the kingdom of Gwalior in the state of Madhya Pradesh, was ruled by the Maratha Sardar Scindia, and Indore was ruled by Holkar. The battle for suzerainty and fiefdom resulted in Scindia defeating Holkar, thus winning Indore. Holkar

had to flee, and with his few remaining soldiers headed towards Udaipur. He heard about Shriji's abundant wealth. Greed got the better of him, and he readied his men for an attack on Sinhad.

A Kothāriyā Rājput chieftain Rāvji, took Shriji to Ghasar. This village was a few kms. from Udaipur, and protected by high mountains from all sides. A very safe place indeed. So they built a small temple, but a replica of the one in Sinhad. Shriji moved in V. S. 1858 on aso sud 8 day.

Once his duty of installing Shriji was complete, Rāvji returned to face the onslaught of Holkar and his army. In this confrontation, he became a martyr. But the Rānā and the *Tilkāyat* had gathered a force, which defeated them. They turned tail and ran. Shriji stayed on in Ghasyar till V. S. 1864, for five years, and then returned to Sinhad; He has been there ever since.

Today, there is a road leading to Udaipur, via Ghasyar, Khimnor and *Haldighāti*. There, Shriji is served even today, where sévā is done. Please do visit it, and recollect and



Army afraid of bees

reminiscence Shriji's leela's as they unfolded.

34. A TEMPLE WITH FOUR SQUARE COURT-YARDS

Shriji was enshrined in Sinhad. As one day rolled into another, this place grew commercially and it acquired a new name Shri Nathdwara. Today it is a very large city.

Shriji's haveli there, is grand and awe-inspiring. There is an enormous entrance, leading from the market to the temple. It is called 'Laldwar.' There is a square courtyard inside, where the entrance to Shriji's temple is exactly opposite. Right above, is an arrangement for the musicians to sit and play the drums and *shehnai*. They provide Shriji with music everyday at Rajbhog time.

The entrance door leads to the first square court yard, called Govardhan chowk; to the left of this 'chowk' is Shri Navneetpriji's temple and the entrance to Moti Mahal. In the opposite direction, there are nine steps, which lead to the entrance door of *Surajpol*, inside of which is *Ratna chowk*. To the right of *Govardhan chowk*, at the end, there are nine marble steps leading to *Dholi Patiyā chowk*. Here flowers are sold early in the morning; and in the evening shopkeepers sell shringar and pictures, it is a riot of colour. To its left is the entrance door to *Sinhpol*, through which one has to pass to reach *Kamal chowk*. In the centre of chowk is a beautifully engraved marble lotus. It provides for good

seating facility for Vaishnavs. On the left again, there are two huge engraved elephants, where lies the *Hāthipol* gate. Through this gate one reaches *Ratna chowk*.

The *Ratna chowk* has three big doors to its right, which lead to the *Jagmohan*. It is from here that one gets Shrijibāva's darshan. Shriji is enshrined, in what was *Ajabkunvar's* main house, and which still has a tiled roof. On the top of which is the *Sudarshan chakra* and seven flags. The front portion of the main temple is called *Manikotha*, where the *kirtaniyās* (singers) stand and render *kirtans* for Shriji.

After darshan, one can leave from the three door entrance, which is on the right of *Jagmohan*. There is a small bylane outside, called the *kirtaniya lane*.

From here, the way leads to *Anarchowk*. Which in turn leads to the different '*ghar*' (rooms) for *sévā* like cutting vegetables, preparing pan bidis, stringing a flower necklace. Once again, you re-enter the '*Kamal chowk*' from these rooms, via the right hand door. There is a small window on the right wall of the chowk called *Dhruv-bāri*.

The *Pritampol lane* can be reached via a road straight from *Dholipatiya* and from *Kamal chowk*.

From *Ratnachowk* there is a door leading to Shri Navneet priyaji's garden and further on is the small temple itself, where Shri Navneet-priji is enshrined.

B 513

श्री वल्लभ पुस्तकालय
काठिवाली मुंजर्ग
सुअधाम : २८०९२८३०
सुरेन्द्र न शाले : ८८३३२७२३८३
क्रिष्णानेन शाले : ७५०६०८७४६२
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Now that you have it all laid out for you make sure that you miss none of it, on your next visit to Nathdwara.

35. SHRIJI'S EIGHT DARSHANS

Shriji is awakened very early in the morning every single day. The time is marked by a conch shell being blown thrice and a big bell rung thrice. After this Shriji has 'Mangalbhog.'

It is only after this, that Vaishnavs can get darshan, called 'Mangala.' This is the first darshan of the day, and since Aarti is also offered. One can get the darshan.

After Mangala, Shrijibāvā is bathed (*snan*), and bedecked with shringar, according to seasons and manoraths. This is the second darshan called 'shringar.'

Then Shriji has 'Gwalbhog' after which you get 'Gwal' darshan, i.e. the third darshan. Later, Shriji has *Rajbhog*, after which is the fourth darshan, *Rajbhog* darshan, with the aarti darshan.

These four darshans take place in the morning after which Shriji rests.

In the evening when Shriji awakens, the same conch shell and bell are sounded thrice. Now it is time for *Utthapan darshan*.

Later, Shriji has *Utthapanbhog*. Then it is time for Bhog darshan. After which Shriji has *Sandhyabhog*, followed by sandhya aarti darshan.

After this, Shriji's shringar is removed, and He has Shayanbhog followed by Shayan darshan with aarti.

Then it is time for Shriji to rest.

36. THE SHRINATHJI

Shriji is adorned with shringar and 'vastra' outfits according to the seasons. He is offered appetising food like *thor*, *mathdi*, and *lādoos*. *Lādoos* are perhaps, most liked by Shriji.

Throughout the year many *utsavs* and festivals are celebrated with colour, pomp, grandeur and gaiety. *Janmāshtmi* is the most important of all *utsavs* and is celebrated with intense faith, love and joy.

The Govardhan puja takes place on next to Diwali day followed by *Annakūt*. That day Shriji is offered 125 *mans* (2500 kgs) of cooked rice along with other food. The *Bhils* (a tribe) grab that rice, after darshan.

The manoraths that take place are *Gopāshtami*, *Prabodhini Ekadasi*, *Shri Gusāiji's utsav*, *Pātotsav*, *Dolotsav*, *Shri Mahāprabhjui's utsav*, *Banglā*, *Phool Mandali*, *Nāv* (boat), *Khaskhana* (a fragrant grass).

On *Snānyātrā*, Shriji is bathed with 108 water pots filled with water. 125 lakh mangoes are offered to Shriji. *Rath Yātrā* and *hindolā* are also celebrated. It is a merry atmosphere throughout the year, and Shriji is always contented and happy.

This same Shriji, who gives bounteous happiness to His devotees, till today, also gives darshan to whoever He favours, He will ask for special food and eat, and He also plays with them !

Hail to Shri Devdaman !

Hail to Shri Girirajdhavan !

Hail to Shri Govardhanath !

Hail to Dear Shriji !

RANGEELĀ SHRINĀTHJI

Maṭhurāmā Śrīnāṭhji Gokulmā Śrīnāṭhji;
Yamunājiné kānṭhé ramṭā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji, albēlā Śrīnāṭhji;
Vallabhkuḷnā vahālā bōlò rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Maḍhuvanmā Śrīnāṭhji, Kuñjanmā Śrīnāṭhji;
Vrīndāvanmā rās ramaṅṭā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Nandgām Śrīnāṭhji, Barsāné Śrīnāṭhji;
Kāmvanmā krēdā kartā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Dāngadh Śrīnāṭhji, Māngadh Śrīnāṭhji;
Sāṅkdi khòré gauras khāṭā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Sāṅkētmā Śrīnāṭhji, Van-vanmā Śrīnāṭhji;
Gahvar vanmā rās ramṭā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Gòvardhanmā Śrīnāṭhji, maragmā Śrīnāṭhji;
Mānsi Gangāmā man hartā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Rādhākund Śrīnāṭhji, Krishnakund Śrīnāṭhji;
Chandrasaròvar chòké ramṭā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Anyormā Śrīnāṭhji, Gòvīndkund Śrīnāṭhji;
Apsara kunde anand karta rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Mandirmā Śrīnāṭhji, parvat par Śrīnāṭhji;
Jaṭipurāmā prakat birājé rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Gām gām Śrīnāṭhji, thām thām Śrīnāṭhji;
Ghar ghar bhòg ārògé rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Manbhāvan Śrīnāṭhji, Manharan Śrīnāṭhji;
Vaiṣnavjannā vahālā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Vallabhkuḷnā Śrīnāṭhji, Vrajvāsinā Śrīnāṭhji;
Bhaktò saṭhé krēdā kartā rangēlā Śrīnāṭhji.

Param Pūjyapād Goswāmi Shri Indirā Bétiji (JIJI)
[Vadodarā-Surat]



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